

CLS 101/201US, *Knowledge and Community*

First Oral Presentation

Why do we have speaking assignments?

Oral presentations will help you develop your speaking skills and so help you succeed in all your courses. They aim to improve your ability to think and communicate effectively. You will gain skill and confidence speaking in class and thinking and speaking “on your feet,” which is the most common type of oral presentation required in classes and professional situations.

Assignment: You will make a short presentation in answer to a question raised in the first readings. The purposes of the short presentation are to give each member of the seminar a chance to present his/her thinking about the course texts, to practice using evidence from the text to support a claim, and to practice giving and receiving feedback on an oral presentation. The presentation should be two to four minutes long with an additional minute for questions from the audience.

This presentation will focus on supporting a claim (or as it’s sometimes called, “making a case”, “making an argument”, or “defending a position.”) You will prepare for this presentation, but will not memorize or perform a set speech. Rather you will talk about your ideas and make your case as a continuation of your seminar conversation.

Suggestions for choosing a topic and presenting a claim: Choose a topic that involves your own strong feelings and opinions, or a topic that motivates or interests you. Look through past reading responses and notes for potential questions you can explore. Think about issues that have been discussed in class. Do any stand out in your mind as worthy of further investigation?

Your goal is to persuade your audience to see that your position has merit, even if they disagree. In order to persuade, you must have an arguable claim. That is, people could legitimately disagree with you. There’s no point trying to persuade people if they already agree with you.

Strategies for developing your argument:

Some people think . . . but I think . . . One favorite strategy is to examine a question that seems to be answered by conventional wisdom and show that the question is by no means settled. The form of the argument is something like “Many people think that fill in the blank, but I would argue that make a contradictory claim.”)

Opposing views. Another strategy is to begin with your own genuine response to a text or to class discussion. Do any issues stand out in your mind as worthy of further investigation? Think of as many arguments as you can that support your response, and more importantly, think of as many arguments as you can to refute your idea. It is best to imagine an interested but skeptical audience. They want to hear what you think, but they really want to know *why* you think it.

Criteria for Evaluating the First Presentation:

- Makes a claim and supports the claim with evidence from the text
- Fairly considers opposing views
- Shows speaker commitment (interest, engagement, care)
- Uses a clear, straight-forward style to communicate (speaks in a clear, audible voice, looks at the audience, keeps the audience's interest, and meets the time requirement)

SUGGESTIONS FOR ORAL PRESENTATIONS:

What questions or concerns might your audience have about your claim? How can you respond? What is your purpose in giving the presentation? In other words, what do you want your audience to think or do as a result of your presentation? How can you help them see your point of view?

- Speak from notes or note cards; don't read a paper.
- Don't keep your head in your notes. Look up at the audience, make eye contact and talk to specific people. Your audience will be more engaged (and more sympathetic) if you look at and talk to them directly.
- Be well-prepared but do not memorize or read your presentation. You want to be thinking and engaged with your material while you deliver the speech. Use key-word notes or short phrases and try not to rely on them extensively.
- Practice your presentation at least *ten* times out loud before your in-class presentation.
- Practice stillness and body control: Plant your feet firmly. When you do *choose* to move or gesture, do so intentionally, to emphasize or highlight a specific point. Preparation is the most effective cure for nervousness and the surest path to confidence.
- Use conversational language and speak with enthusiasm.
- Project and enunciate. Open your mouth and speak up clearly with confidence. Don't trail off or get softer at the end of sentences. A simple exercise for practicing enunciation: Put a pencil between your teeth toward the back of your mouth and try to speak so that your words are clear and intelligible. (Take the pencil out of your mouth before you give your speech in class.)
- Divide your audience into three sections; left, center, right. Center is your 'power position.' You want to begin and end your speech here. Throughout your presentation, make sure you alternate directing your comments toward each of the three sections.
- While you give the presentation, tune in to your audience. Are they listening? Are they interested? Experienced speakers are very good at this and can modify their presentation in response to how they read the audience.

- Contributed by CLS 101 Staff, Greg Owens and Lila Michael