

Some Guidelines for Making a Successful Class Presentation

- ***Clearly state your topic.*** At the very beginning of your talk, tell the audience the topic of your presentation.
- ***Clearly inform the audience about the form as well as the substance of the talk.*** At the beginning of your presentation, briefly outline for the audience what you are going to present. Next, present it. Initiate your closing remarks by highlighting what you have said up to that point.
- ***Provide visual aid.*** Help the audience follow your main points via a handout, overheads, writing on a board or large tablet, or some other medium.
- ***Exhibit your critical maturity.*** Your audience does not want or need to be told solely what someone else has created or written or found or thought. The audience also benefits from learning of your own critical reactions. It is important that you show yourself to be an informed and skilled critic of the work of others. Your presentation will be better received if you show some critical scholarly “attitude” in your talk. That is, for your presentation, try to identify problems in your source materials and discuss them. Presenting your own interpretations will please and inform your audience.
- ***Distinguish normative and descriptive points.*** Audiences are sometimes confused over whether a presenter is stating fact or presenting a point of view. Try to help your listeners make the distinction by being self-aware: am I speaking of the way I think things should be, the way some author thinks they should be, the way some author thinks they are, or an agreed-upon fact? Be sure in your talk that your audience knows the answer to that question.
- ***Limit digressions in your presentation.*** Used sparingly, intriguing anecdotes or personal asides can add to the understandability and human appeal of a presentation. Beyond a certain point, however, anecdotes and asides can deter you from completing your talk gracefully and on time. They can also deter your audience from seeing your main points.
- ***Avoid the two deadly extremes: reading your entire presentation and talking extemporaneously for the entire presentation.*** A successful presentation usually involves balancing reference to formal written material with direct, less formal communication with the audience. Every successful speaker has a distinctive personal style (i.e., success can’t be unilaterally defined), but pursuing either of the two extremes above rarely pleases an audience.
- ***Practice the presentation beforehand.*** Ideally, practice with a friend or family member listening. This serves several purposes. It gives you a sense of the time it will take to give your talk, so you can tailor it appropriately. It familiarizes you with your talk’s flow and imprints some of its key passages in your mind. It gives you a chance to work on communicating to, and empathizing with, an audience. Finally, it aids your own insight into the strengths and weaknesses of your work.