

Presenting Your Project

The Mellon Forum offers you the chance to present your senior project to a friendly audience of peers, to test your ideas and research strategies, and to engage in an intellectual exchange. In terms of length, your task shouldn't prove overwhelming: we call for a 18-20 minute talk. (To give you an indication of length, that's 9-10 pages, courier 12pt., double-spaced, when read at a speed that listeners can follow.) Nor should your presentation overwhelm you in terms of content. Remember that this is a work in progress, not a polished, complete project. Loose ends, incomplete findings are not only okay; they can prove very interesting.

To help you shape your presentation, we offer the following tips:

1. Clarity is the most important feature of a presentation. Think who your audience is: if they don't all know about Buckyballs or the economy of Malaysia, then your task is to provide some basics before moving into project specifics.
2. Your talk should of course have a point. Because you cannot cover everything that your project will address, you may present only one aspect of the senior project (say, one year in Truman's presidency, one question about economic ties between Hong Kong and the mainland, one line of imagery in A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, and so on.) Or you may want to paint your project ideas or thesis questions in broad strokes. Whatever approach you take, you must have a point, a thesis idea, an argument.
3. Your talk must also have a beginning, a middle, and an end. No rambling. Because it is harder to follow a spoken argument than a written one, you should ensure that the purpose of your project, your thesis, is clear and delivered early in your talk. Indeed, this is a time when a bold thesis statement up front can be a great help. In addition, transitions between the sections of your talk need to be as clear as possible. You should consider using more obvious signposts than you might for a written essay: "Now I am going to examine..."; "there are three things to consider: first..., second..., and third...". And so on. Finally, your conclusion should provide a sense of closure and achievement.
4. Visual aids are a great idea! As a handout, you might use a timeline or an outline of major points. Charts, tables, drawings, cartoons all make helpful handouts. You may also request a slide projector and/or overhead from the Master's Office. The more you engage the visual sense of your audience, the more vivid your ideas become.
5. Make sure you have read aloud your paper or notes sufficient times to be comfortable addressing the audience. That is to say, you should be familiar enough with your words to be able to look at the audience regularly. This ensures that you direct your voice properly outwards, rather than downwards at your paper.

Points for Presentations

- Your actual presentation should be short--plan on 10 minutes. You can expand on points during the question period.
- Keep in mind your audience is interested but not well versed in your particular subject--select highlights of your project to present or choose just one aspect of your project.
- If you use power point, make sure that you use it primarily for images, not text--and if you use text, keep it to a minimum--in other words do not fill a slide with text and read it--death by power point!
- Bring your presentation on a flash drive and save it in the older form of power point--ppt.
- Come at 5:45 promptly so we can upload all the presentations on the Morse Computer.
- Arrange for a friend to introduce you.

~The ABC's of an Oral Presentation~

A is for Audience.

Know your audience's level of knowledge of your subject, level of interest in your subject, and level of connection to you.

B is for Body.

Body communicates. Think about what you will do with your hands and eyes, for instance. Where and how will you stand? Will you move about?

C is for Coherence.

Coherence in your formation of sentences: speak in complete sentences; finish a sentence before you begin the next; avoid "like," "like, you know," and "um."

Coherence in the organization of the presentation: An elegant whole comprises engaging parts. A presentation can be an art form that is aesthetically pleasing.

~Four Tips for an Oral Presentation~

The speaker's organization of ideas is essential for the success of an oral presentation precisely because it is oral. A listener can only take in so much information before getting lost, confused, or overwhelmed. When we read and encounter confusion, we can pause and go back. When we listen, we are thrust forward.

- **Keep it short.** Recognize that your listeners have a limited attention span. If you go on too long, you risk losing your listeners or abusing their good will.
- **Decide which information about your topic is essential and discard the rest.** The point of the presentation is not to tell the listener everything you know about your topic. It is rather to introduce the topic to the listener, to inform the listener of the topic. If you succeed in sparking interest, the listeners may ask questions. At that point you can go into detail. Remember, more is not necessarily better. Avoid the trap of thinking that your audience will be impressed if you show how much you know. **It isn't the quantity of knowledge or information that counts, but the clarity and coherence of its presentation.**
- **Organize your information into three or four points.** Three points are ideal. If you announce at the outset of your talk what three main points you will present, the listener will find it easier to follow and to comprehend.
- **Give your presentation a conclusion.** Ineffective speakers tend simply to stop talking in order to indicate that they are finished or, even worse, say, "Well, okay, I guess I'm done." End with something like "In conclusion," or "To conclude," or "I would like to leave you with this thought."

Some of these ideas are from a handout given to me by John Loge, Dean of Timothy Dwight College at Yale.