

Class Presentations

Purpose: The class presentation serves two main purposes. First, it will hopefully help you become a better public speaker. Being able to effectively communicate your thoughts/ideas/arguments/etc. to an audience of your peers is an important skill to have, and you only learn it by doing it. This is a way to begin learning how to competently and confidently deliver a presentation. Second, it is a way to begin or continue class discussion that enables us to focus on what you take to be worth discussing, not what I think is worth discussing. This is both more engaging for the class and also the most effective way to get your ideas and arguments on the table for us to evaluate, and that, after all, is the point of the course.

Your purpose: Your presentation should have a clear objective, and it needs to be clear to everyone what that objective is. If you're giving a presentation before we've started talking about a topic in class, I'm fairly open about what your specific objective is. Broadly, you should try to get us interested in the topic. You might try to convince us that we are embarking on a problem worth addressing and discussing. You might give us a sense of why the issue is so important, or why it is so contentious. You might give us your opinion on the issue, supporting that opinion as best you can. Peppering your presentation with actual facts is always nice, though be sure those facts are presented in a way that contributes to your overall objective.

Most of you will be giving a presentation after we've already started discussing a particular topic. In this case, your objective is to briefly review the material from the previous class by criticizing/questioning/elaborating on the argument(s) we've previously discussed. To be clear, your objective is not to just repeat those arguments. This may be part of what you do, but you need to go beyond this and make some arguments suggesting why the argument might be mistaken or ways in which the argument might be extended.

Structure: You should have a clear introduction to your presentation in which you make it clear what your objective is. Your audience should not be wondering throughout why you're telling us what you're telling us. Make it clear up front what your objective is. For example: "I'm going to tell you about abortion" is not a clear objective. This gives the audience no sense of what you're actually going to say, or what the purpose of your presentation is. On the other hand, "I'm going to explain why Mary Ann Warren's definition of "person" is seriously flawed" does give us a pretty clear sense of what you're going to say.

You should also make it clear to us why we should care about what you're saying. That is, after you've told us what you're going to say, imagine someone asks you, "so what?" You need to answer the "so what" question at some point in the presentation. Using the previous example, if Warren is wrong about what constitutes a person, then her pro-choice position falls apart. That answer's the "so what" question.

The body of the presentation should accomplish the objective you set for yourself in the beginning. Everything you say should relate to the overall objective of the presentation, and it

should be clear to your audience how what you're telling us does relate.

Finally, you should have a conclusion that clearly states what you take yourself to have accomplished with the presentation.

Style: What you say is important, but it's also important how you say it. Make eye contact with the audience. Do not just read from notes. Try to be conversational. This is not a "speech," it is a presentation. You're not running for office, you're trying to express and communicate ideas and arguments in the most effective way you can. Avoid verbal stalls (uh, um, etc.). Don't use technical jargon unless it's necessary and you explain it first. Don't stand frozen in one spot. It's okay to move around. Have fun, don't be nervous, it'll all be okay.

Written component: You are required to submit to me a paper or detailed outline of your presentation. This is not a formal paper. The main purpose of this is to give me a sketch of your presentation so that I don't have to spend my time furiously writing notes on what you're saying and can instead listen to what you're actually saying and how you're saying it. Writing it down will also force you to think about the structure of the presentation beforehand and hopefully help you organize your thoughts.

Grading: Content of the presentation will determine 70% of your grade, that is, are you saying something interesting/worth discussing, are you supporting that with solid arguments, do you understand the material well and are you demonstrating that you have actively engaged that material. The rest of the grade will be determined by how effective you are at communicating with the audience, both structurally and stylistically.

I will not grade your presentation if you do not give me the written component before the presentation begins.

You may do more than one presentation throughout the semester if you wish. I will use the highest grade when calculating final grades.