

## A Guide to Oral Presentations

Oral expression and communication are skills generally neglected in the university curriculum in the US. This exercise is designed as a modest corrective, at least for those students who want to develop these skills and/or do well on the participation portion of their grade. I strongly encourage students to do these presentations, as the benefits are quite substantial.

The main goal of such a presentation is to generate a discussion by identifying issues in the reading that merit closer attention or more consideration from the class as a group. To put it a bit differently, the idea is to be able to identify and to frame historical problems. What principal issues do the day's readings raise? What question could you ask that would encompass those main issues and allow us to better understand them? In part this involves taking a stand: "I believe that we should view the appearance of terrorism in Russia as a reflection of X, Y, and Z." In some cases, the best way to frame the main issues may involve identifying a triad for discussion (we shall discuss what a triad is early in the semester). Or you may make an assertion. Or you may pose a question and relate why you think this question is especially useful for understanding the reading for the day.

What are the basic requirements of the exercise? You should be prepared to appear before the class, standing. If you want any visual aids from the computer, then you should e-mail those to me in advance of the class session and come at least a few minutes early to set those up. You may use the computer terminal + projector and any other technology that we have in the room. You should count on your presentation lasting 1-2 minutes (not much!), since we won't have time for a lot more. This means that you will have to be very focused and precise, which in turn implies that you are well prepared and have a very good sense of what you wish to say. Try to be clear and forceful in your statements, avoiding "um," "uh," and other words that convey unpreparedness, hesitation, or confusion. People may disagree with your formulations, but you should not be concerned about that, because the idea is precisely to get the discussion going. You may even wish to be intentionally provocative, though do not do this in a silly fashion. Do everything you can to avoid reading, since that usually becomes very boring – yes, even for one minute. Consult me in advance if there is a session you wish to introduce.

This will be an evolving exercise, so I do not wish to over-prescribe at the outset. If no one volunteers, then we shall not do anything among these lines (though my idea of "voluntary" is closer to the Soviet one than to the Anglo-American one). Students may present more than once, though my goal will always be to give preference to those who have not yet presented.

**What's the Point?** There are two main points to this exercise. The first is to give students more practice in public speaking, since oral communication skills are at a premium in many workplaces. The idea is encourage the presentation of precise, substantive, and concise information. The second point is to develop skills in identifying and framing problems. The idea here is to extract a major issue from a set of readings that can be interpreted in a variety of ways. What is the best way to understand – to approach and contemplate – the materials we have read for the given day? Both of these are crucial skills in virtually any job setting, and the first is relevant to virtually any relationship that you have, aside from those that occur exclusively in writing.