Tips for Verbal Presentations

Preparation:

- The key to a strong verbal presentation is **adequate and sufficient preparation**. You must become an “expert” on your chosen topic in order to convey useful, interesting, and detailed information about your subject. Research your topic widely, and consult books, articles, primary works, and websites on your subject.
- Consider your audience, your chosen topic, and your time requirements in determining how detailed you should make your presentation. Make sure you can adequately fill your time with detailed information, and make sure that your discussion moves beyond information previously discussed in class.

Content:

- Provide a broad introduction, or overview, to your chosen author and topic.
- Arrange your material by sub-topics, themes, or related sections.
- Make sure that you provide important dates and historical facts, and define any terminology that may be unfamiliar to your audience members.
- Make sure that your presentation is organized logically. Avoid presenting a list of seemingly unrelated facts. Group ideas into categories and demonstrate how ideas are connected to each other.
- Share sources with your audience when you take specific information from sources. It is appropriate to say, “According to John Smith, scholar in the field of . . . .,” in a verbal presentation, just as you would in a written paper.

Delivery:

- Do not read more than 25% of your presentation. You may rely on notes or note cards, but do not merely read your notes to the class.
- Do not prepare a paper and then read the entire paper to the class. Make sure that you are familiar enough with the material to talk in detail about it while referring at times to your notes.
- Speak directly to your audience.
- Make eye contact with your audience members frequently, and shift your gaze to various points around the room.
- Do not look at the floor while talking.
- Do not turn your back toward the audience or read the PowerPoint slides. If you are using PowerPoint, glance at it occasionally while talking directly to the audience.
- Speak clearly and try to avoid excessive use of verbal pauses (“um,” “uh,” “like,” etc.).
- Stand relatively still with your knees slightly bent – do not rock back and forth.
- Do not apologize for your lack of preparation or mention things that you could have included in your presentation but did not.
You may use hand gestures if they seem natural and unaffected. Try to avoid hand gestures or body movements that are distracting (feet tapping, pencil tapping, constant hand movements, etc.).

- If you feel nervous, hold on to the podium in order to avoid distracting hand movements.
- Recognize that nervousness is completely natural. Expect to feel nervous, and understand that it often motivates you to create a stronger presentation and to do a better job.
- Practice your presentation in front of friends or family members, or in front of a mirror. Recognize the areas where you get “stuck” or where you need additional transitions between ideas, further concrete details, etc.

**Visual Component:**
- If you use a PowerPoint presentation, remember to include brief phrases most of the time, rather than long sentences or paragraphs. (Sometimes longer quotations are necessary to emphasize an important point.)
- Use bullet points to organize material.
- Try to make your presentation visually appealing without being distracting.
- Choose a font that is large enough to read from the back of the room and relatively simple in design.
- Use pictures if appropriate to your topic and helpful in understanding the subject.
- Use the PowerPoint only to highlight main ideas, not to write out the majority of your information.
- Remember that the PowerPoint should clarify and aid in understanding the material and making connections between ideas.
- Handouts can provide a written record of the presented material, references, or supplemental material.
- If you choose to provide a handout, make sure that the handout is clear, easy to follow, and relatively detailed. At the end of the handout, provide any sources used in preparing the material.
- Leave enough white space on the handout for listeners to take notes.
- Include on the handout your name, the title and date of the presentation, and a brief outline of the major points in the presentation.

**Tips for Audience Members:**
- Listen politely at all times to the presentations.
- Do not text, check your cell phone, or read unrelated material.
- Make eye contact with the speaker.
- Take notes when presented with interesting or important facts.
- Do not put your head on the desk or seem otherwise disinterested or bored.
- Keep facial expressions positive and polite.