Content, Structure, and Delivery: What to Say in a Presentation (and How to Say It)

THE WHAT: Content

- Make a sentence outline, either working from a draft or completed paper or outlining your main points for a project.
- Then, cut out any of these sentences that are not vital for you to make your point.
- Using your pared-down sentence outline, find one or two specific pieces of evidence from your research to support each.
- Don’t overwhelm your audience by reading many long quotations from other sources; one or two well-placed quotations might help add some power and authority to your presentation.
- Decide which statistics, facts, figures, or dates are essential for you to discuss aloud. If you must show a progression over time or make a comparison of statistics, you might use a visual aid.

THE HOW: Structure and Delivery

- Work from notecards or a one-page sentence outline; don’t read from a script or read slides.
- Write one topic sentence for each main point you want to cover, and practice it so it sounds polished and natural.
- Write out transition phrases or sentences between each main section of your talk and put them in bold or all-caps on your outline. Rehearse these, too.
- Include signal phrases to cite material drawn from the work of others (“As Bernard Smith has pointed out…”).
- Write out a short introduction (approximately 1 minute) and a short conclusion (around 30 seconds).
- Then, MEMORIZE your intro and conclusion, as well as your transitions.
- Prepare ahead of time for questions.
- Perhaps consider an interactive element, something that asks the audience to respond to you or to each other.

...and asking WHY: Using Visual Aids

- Ask yourself the hard question, “Why do I want to use slides (or handouts or other visuals)?”
- Visual aids can be helpful if you need to illustrate complex concepts that are difficult to visualize or create a certain mood or tone.
- Visual aids can detract from your presentation when they are overly detailed or flashy, simply serve as cue cards, or limit interaction with your audience.
- Handouts can be useful for showing data that you want everyone to look at several times or to gather quotations that you don’t read aloud during your presentation.
- Avoid the temptation to simply read a handout straight through to your audience; even consider not giving out the handout until near the end of the presentation.
- Slides or Prezi might be preferable to handouts if you have many different data sets you need to go through, or if you need to display essential visual images (photographs, maps, etc.) to complement your discussion.