Presenting Final Research

Once you have completed your research project, you may be asked to share your findings and conclusions with others in a more formal presentation, helping each other add to the knowledge base you will all draw on as you continue your conversation with others in the field.

WHAT TO SAY

- To begin, **make a sentence outline** of your entire paper—this entails summarizing each paragraph in a single sentence and organizing those sentences into smaller paragraphs of related points.
- Then, keeping in mind the time allotted for your presentation, **cut out any of these sentences** that are interesting but not vital for an audience’s understanding.
- Using your pared-down sentence outline, **find one or two specific pieces of evidence** from your research to support each; then work on smooth transitions between all the sections.
- Create a **working outline** of the entire presentation. This is not a script but an outline of key phrases and, at most, topic sentences.
- Write out an **introduction and conclusion** and memorize only this text. (You might borrow from your paper’s intro or ending, but tailor the language for the spoken presentation.) You might also write out and rehearse your **transition sentences**.

HOW TO SAY IT

- Although **one or two well-placed quotations** can help add some power and authority to your presentation, don’t overwhelm your audience by reading many long quotations from other sources, no matter how interesting or well-written they may be—listeners might get confused about where the quote begins or ends, or whether it’s a quotation at all.
- Similarly, 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, use a visual aid of some sort to display the information rather than trying to make listeners strain to keep it all straight.
- Prepare ahead of time for **questions**: rehearse your presentation and ask your rehearsal audience to lob the questions they might imagine your listeners having.
- If possible and permissible within the context of your presentation, add a **interactive element**, something that asks the audience to respond to you or to each other. This can be as simple as taking a show of hands on a few questions to see how much your audience knows, or asking them to describe to you what they see on a visual aid (for example, telling you what a graph seems to be showing).

VISUAL AIDS:

Handouts can be useful for showing data that you want everyone to look at several times (rather than having them squint at a PowerPoint slide); handouts can also be a place to gather some of the important 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 the handout out until near the end of the presentation.

PowerPoint might be preferable to handouts if you have many different data sets you need to go through, or if you want to display visual images (photographs, maps, etc.) to complement your discussion. Using PowerPoint well is an art; consult with good online guides for more advice.