Presenting Research in Progress

The overall purpose of presenting research in progress (in a research proposal presentation, for example) is inquiry: you’re sharing what you’ve learned so far and how you hope to develop it so that you might hear from others what questions they have, where they felt confused, and which new directions they think you might pursue.

WHAT TO SAY

- Remember that this type of presentation is about your work in progress. You don’t have to have firm conclusions yet. Offer some possible ends you see reaching, and find out from your audience whether they think those are achievable.
- Don’t worry at this point about having every statistic lined up to support yourself or every quotation at hand. However, do be able to speak confidently about what the major scholars you’ve read have argued.
- Discuss your methodology, both what you have already done and what else you hope to do. A classmate may have run into a source or idea that would work well for you and can bring this up during this time.

HOW TO SAY IT

- Although you are on the spot for a somewhat formal presentation, think of the in-progress presentation as a conversation. Be open to interruptions or questions as you go, and stop and ask questions aloud—for yourself or for your audience—if some occur to you.

VISUAL AIDS

You might not use many visual aids during this kind of session; a full PowerPoint show, for example, might not be feasible if you haven’t yet collected all the information you’d want to share in this visual medium. A handout, however, might be helpful. Consider a handout of the working outline of your final project; don’t read the outline at your audience but call their attention to each section as it comes up in your presentation. And since it’s a working outline, you can solicit advice from your listeners on how you might improve the organization or the development of ideas.

Active Listening and Peer Feedback

- Remember that the feedback you provide to a presenter will have a direct impact on the way your classmate shapes his or her final research project.
- Take notes (on an outline, if provided) with questions you have or terms you want better explained. Also note any parts of the proposal that sounded particularly interesting or fruitful. However, don’t let note-taking keep you from giving attention and eye contact to the speaker.
- Try to make a sketch of the speaker’s organizational scheme. Even if the speaker has provided you with an outline, you may find as a listener that the speaker skips around or needs to bring related points closer together.
- When it comes time to offer feedback, make comments that are constructive and specific rather than general. For example, instead of saying, “I was confused by your organization,” say, “The section on the economic implications of the Beijing Olympics needs to go earlier.”
- Ask the presenter what visual aids he or she might plan to use in the final presentation. Make specific suggestions about what the audience might find helpful: “I’d like to see images of Beijing clean-up” or “You’ll probably want to offer a graph that shows how the population changed over time.”