The Elements of Effective Oral Presentations

*with advice from Writing Fellows*

**Clarity of Argument**
- Build your argument as you would in a written assignment.
- Remember that the audience can’t review what you said while speaking, unlike in a paper where they can flip back and reread.
- One way to make it clear how the argument is developing is with explicit signposts
  - Ex: First, Second, Third; Now we’ll be moving to; etc.
- Another useful strategy is to provide periodic summaries as you move to new points.

**Nonverbal Communication**
- Make eye contact with members of the audience without staring. A useful strategy is hopping from person to person while making and breaking eye contact.
- Only use natural gestures while presenting -- moderation is key. Watch your hands!
- Be conscious of your stance and position whether you’re presenting on stage or at a podium. Stand up straight and avoid leaning.

**Clarity of Speech**
- Be aware of the pacing of your speech. Speakers tend to speak too quickly out of nervousness, so try and slow down and speak at a pace below what you might normally use.
- Speak slowly, calmly, and confidently. This will help you convey authority and avoid making speech errors.
- Be aware of your own speech patterns. Do you sometimes speak with a catch in your throat? Do you click your teeth in between sentences? Finding patterns like these with a friend will help you speak more clearly and understandably.
• Practice, practice, practice. Try and replicate the situation you will actually be presenting in as closely as possible (standing v sitting, audience, visual aids) and go over the presentation several times. Familiarity with your material will help you speak clearly and confidently.

Script vs. Notecards vs. Memorization
• Cater preparation to your individual needs.
  • Do you get particularly nervous? (Try writing out a script.)
  • Are there a lot of technical terms you may stumble over? (Put those terms on notecards.)
• Figure out exactly what you want to communicate. Those key points are what you should memorize/put on notecards.
• Know how your main points connect. That way, if you get off track, you’ll know which key point to return to. In this way, your main points can serve as specific cues to help remind you what’s next.
• Familiarize yourself with your surroundings, if possible. Knowing the physical space in which you’ll be presenting can help you feel more prepared.

Improvisation and Getting Back on Track
• It is easy to get sidetracked during presentations.
• DO NOT PANIC, as there are many ways to prepare for this.
• Be sure you understand what you want to say more than how you want to say it.
  • Practice saying things in different ways so you have room to play.
• Practice with an audience and have them ask you questions so you aren’t thrown off.
• Remember that this is just talking about a topic, which you likely do every day.

Visual Aids
• Multimedia is fun! Take the opportunity to use a range of high quality images, graphs, audio, video, etc. where appropriate.
• Judiciously choose a theme, colors and fonts that match the tone of your information (e.g. no Comic Sans for a technical presentation!).
• Keep the slides simple and clean, with as few lines of text as possible. Balance between text and audiovisuals is key.