Rae X. Yan
University of Florida
© 2019

A Guide to Preparing Presentations

Purpose of a Presentation

All researchers and critics have to give presentations at some point. The general purpose of presentations is to synthesize and disseminate findings to others (scholars, students, or the general public) to get them engaged in the research and findings at hand. Ideally, after a good presentation, your audience becomes so interested in the work presented that they want to hear and see *more* of that work, and/or work closely with the presenter (as expert on the material) in the future.

The specific purpose of our summative presentations in this class is to practice analyzing, synthesizing, and disseminating information from a scholarly resource or resources that you selected to present on earlier this semester. To that end, your goals are three-fold: (1) to explain the ideas of your scholarly resource(s) clearly in your own straightforward terms; (2) to make connections between this resource or resources and our readings; and (3) to practice the professional presentation skills you will be using in your future academic and professional careers.

You are expected to create an effective visual or textual presentation to accompany your presentation through a PowerPoint presentation or Word document handout. Remember that your audience may want to use the information that you have synthesized during your presentation for their own papers or research, so you should outline/visualize the information presented in a clear, logical fashion with plenty of signposting and citation to indicate where your audience can go for more in the reading about an idea or subject. That is, you should ensure that your visual presentation or text handout is easy to read quickly, full of credible resources, and organized clearly. You are allowed to bring a script with you to use as you present.

> **IMPORTANT**: Do not imagine that you can prepare an adequate presentation the night before or even the day before you are going to give it. For best results, begin preparing for your presentation at least a full week before you are slated to present.

> **Ask for help** with research, planning, presenting, as much as you want; I'm here for you. You are not being asked to memorize any information for this presentation—you may bring a script or notes.

Steps to Preparing a Presentation

I. About a week or more before your presentation, read the scholarly resource(s) you selected to present 3 times. Twice on the same day, once on the next day.
Read through your source(s) 1 time without highlighting or taking notes on anything; after the first read-through, write 2 to 3 sentences summarizing what you think the resource(s) argue(s). Take a 10-minute break and walk around, then go back to your source(s) and reread, carefully highlighting phrases or sentences that seem like particularly important key points. Wait 12 to 24 hours and reread the reading(s) a 3rd time, marking the phrases or sentences that stand out to you this third time.

Rae X. Yan
University of Florida
© 2019

II. *Transcribe passages of note.*

Take some time to copy/transcribe the passages in a Word document. Make sure to preserve the page numbers of the passages so you can re-reference them later.

III. *Select best information to present*

Read through the passages you have collected. You may find that you don't want to use all the passages that you have collected. Select the most important passages and organize those in groupings.

IV. *Summarize and synthesize the information from your resource in your own terms*

Try to summarize the ideas of the passages in your own terms or in terms that you think your peers would best understand. Try to find ways to tie the information you have gathered back to the text. You must attempt to synthesize the information that you've found with an interpretation of the text in your presentation.

V. *Organize your content for your presentation and handout*

Take a little time (30 minutes) to make a rough outline of how you will present your information in a logical manner so you will know how to lay out your presentation and handout. Then, lay out this information on your PowerPoint and handout with all your notes so that it is presented concisely and neatly. Make sure to not overload a slide or bullet point. Add images in PowerPoint as necessary. Note that if you are using presentation software like PowerPoint, it may take you a long time to find and credit images.

Make sure to…

I. *Be aware of your audience*

Writing a script for a presentation where you will be *speaking aloud* and, perhaps, showing slides or other visual materials is not the same as writing a regular paper. Listening audiences need more direction than readers. Your audience needs to know where they need to really pay attention, so focus on having a well-organized presentation with a lot of signposting of important take-away ideas. Start your audience off with a map or overview of what you will say. Throughout your presentation, use a lot of "signposting" language to guide your audience (e.g. "First, I'll do this… second, I'll do this… lastly, I'll talk about this…" and/or "The idea of … is critical to our understanding of …. because….").

You need to focus on writing short, direct sentences using an active voice so that your listening audience can follow along easily. Listening audiences also need a reason to stay interested in the material—speak loudly so those with hearing needs can understand you, add inflection when you speak, change up the pacing of your speech at important points, try to find your personal style of presentation.

II. *Be aware of your time limitations*

7 to 10 minutes per speaker is NOT a lot of time. Remember, you need to account for pauses to allow your audience time to digest your words, laugh, or applaud you. It usually takes a speaker

Rae X. Yan
University of Florida

2 minutes to read 1 regular double-spaced page at a reasonable pace, so the most you should produce for a script is 3½ pages. Even then, I would suggest that you aim for a maximum of 3 full pages.

You should make sure to time yourself speaking to ensure you stay within your time limit; remember that no one will be able to hear you if you speak too quickly and you might put your audience to sleep if you speak too slowly. You want to have a good sense of your speaking pace. No one has ever been disappointed their audience by ending their presentation a tiny bit early; however, the cardinal sin of presentations is going over time.

III. Focus your content
Given the 7 to 10-minute time limitation, you will not have an exhaustive opportunity to explore your rich resource. Focus on making a *few* nuanced points about how your topic helps us understand something about the text. Marshalling your best facts, examples, and evidence to support that overarching point in a logical and understandable manner will take up most of the time. To that end, make sure that you are not overwhelming your audience with information—you may find, to your surprise, that you only have time to emphasize 3 to 4 key points about the reading to full satisfaction, which will more than satisfy your audience.

IV. Make precise points
Be precise when you present facts, examples, evidence, or terms. If you are going to use a specific term, make sure to define the term clearly and precisely according to the specific way the text uses that term. If you're giving an example or fact, quickly show or state where you got that fact. Do not launch into generalizations (e.g. "All humans during the modern time…"), overly-long summaries, or show large blocks of text on a slide.

Show us the short, sweet, direct evidence or information. Quickly summarize the less important information for your audience and tell the audience (verbally, or on your slides and handout) where they can go for more information.

V. Think about visual rhetoric when using presentation software or visualizations/handouts
If you use presentation software like PowerPoint, use it strategically. Avoid showing slides that are just big blocks of text. Do not directly read text off a slide—this approach to presentation is called "Death by PowerPoint." If you put text on a slide, use shorter quotes or phrases, making the text large (at least size 30 font) and easily readable. Since visualization software is meant to emphasize visualizations, use relevant visualizations as often as you can. However, remember not to make slides overflow with visual information—a single clear visual per slide is often quite enough.

This emphasis on concision and visual clarity can also be extended to handouts. Handouts should not consist of too many large chunks of text, as this can often be overwhelming for your readers. Instead, try to visually arrange information clearly by using headings, sub-headings, bolding, and italicizing to organize and highlight particular ideas. Remember not to go overboard with text formatting either, as too much formatting cab be distracting.

Rae X. Yan
University of Florida

VI. Practice your presentation (with slides and other materials) at least 4 times
Make sure to practice your presentation at least 4 times: once in the drafting stage to know how long it takes you to speak, at least twice the night before your actual presentation, and then once more the morning before your presentation. Take notes in your scripts where you need to add a dramatic pause, emphasize a particular point by stating it more loudly, or give your audience more time to look at a visual or take in information. Having a mock audience during your practice sessions, such as a roommate or friend, is often useful.