SPEECHES AND PRESENTATIONS

Most of us get nervous about having to present in front of a live audience, often regardless of how high the stakes are. When you’re in panic mode, you might forget that preparing speeches and presentations isn’t altogether that different from writing a paper. Sure, the immediacy of interaction puts more emphasis on the audience, but you have to consider who you’re “talking to” in any communication. There’s the added element of the unexpected (audience questions and reactions), and you usually have to deal with technology for including visuals. But if you do your research and practice your presentation as many times as you can, there’s no reason why you shouldn’t have a good time showing off your talents to a supportive crowd.

✓ Research your subject matter thoroughly. Cast a wide net around your presentation topic, looking up details and related information. This will put you in a better position to answer unexpected questions.

✓ Keep in mind everything you know about written assignments (structure, flow, variety, etc.); they mostly apply to presentations as well. Pay particular attention to clarity: remember that a live audience, unlike people reading your paper, needs to be able to follow along at the pace you set, without having to puzzle over what you mean.

✓ Think about what you want your audience to think/feel/do, and plan to use both verbal and visual tools to elicit the desired response.

✓ Arrange your ideas in a logical order that will help your audience follow your train of thought. This will also help you move more effortlessly from one topic to the next.

✓ Prepare note cards with short phrases for jogging your memory. Keep in mind that you won’t be able to read full sentences without losing your connection with the audience.

PowerPoint/Prezi

✓ Keep it simple: remember that the aim is to enhance your presentation, not to overtake it.

✓ Use phrases in bullet points instead of full sentences as sign posts and reminders of the main points you’re making.

✓ Use visuals to illustrate your topic. You might want to think of this as translating your main ideas into images and ordering them in a way that follows the logical structure of your speech. Try looking at the succession of images as a visual version of the story you are telling. If you are not sure how to use the programs or need technical help, you can visit the Studio on the 3rd floor of the library.
Once you feel satisfied with what you have, practice your presentation out loud to notice problems and address them before the actual show. The library has two rooms you can book for practicing presentations: 202 and 203. You can even record yourself—better to be embarrassed before it counts so you can work on improvements. If you take it seriously, you can also learn how to deal with your nerves before the real thing.

**what to practice ...**

✓ Speak clearly (use appropriate volume and enunciation).
✓ no filler words (like, um, uh, ah, okay, right, you know, like I said, etc.)
✓ no defensive or nervous body language
✓ Be yourself (don't try to emulate someone else's style—find your own).
✓ Don't be afraid to pause for a few seconds when you need to or to give your audience time to reflect.

✓ Choose an outfit in which you feel comfortable presenting yourself
✓ Remember that the nervousness you are still feeling is actually adrenaline that you can convert into positive energy, making your speech livelier and more persuasive.
✓ Talk TO your audience not AT them. Make them into participants instead of just passive listeners; this will help you feel like you are having a good conversation instead of being put on display.
✓ Most of all, trust yourself and the work you already invested, and enjoy the ride!