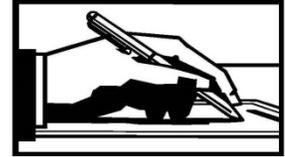


## Teaching with Writing (TWW) Tip Writing to Prepare for Oral Presentations

Teaching with Writing



Many program, majors, and courses require oral presentations, in part because oral presentations will be a fact of professional life upon graduation. Oral presentations may involve different technologies and modes of expression, but the writing of oral presentations isn't always addressed in assignments or instruction. The following ideas can help your students to become familiar with some conventional strategies for writing oral presentations. Note: this tip does not address specific presentation technologies or 'writing effective slides.'

**Introduce typical organizational patterns for the presentations you assign:** Different topics, audiences, and purposes will influence the design of an oral presentation. While selecting an apt organizational scheme independently may be a learning goal in upper division courses, providing advice about the emphasis, audience, timing, and organizational strategy can help students meet assessment criteria.

For example, consider these two sets of assignment instructions:

*Prepare a 15-minute presentation on the findings of your research paper on architecture in your assigned city. Use examples to illustrate both the typical style and exceptions to it.*

*Prepare a 15-minute presentation for an audience of interested professionals on the architecture of your assigned city. After a brief introduction, spend at least five minutes describing the dominant architectural styles of your assigned city and the social, cultural, and historical considerations that may be the source of this aesthetic. Next, identify at least three examples of the architectural style that you identified in part one (approximately two minutes each). Finally, identify at least two examples of architecture in your city that appear to challenge the dominant aesthetic and suggest reasons for this difference.*

While prescribing an organizational pattern will make presentations more standardized, it can also help to place the focus on the development, depth, and specificity of the assignment rather than considerations of its performance. In the second set of instructions, the student has enough structure to understand the overall expectations of the presentation, but still has significant responsibility to develop appropriate content and analysis.

**Encourage students to submit drafts of presentation-specific genres:**

For some students, outlining is a very effective way to begin developing a presentation. The ability to create a hierarchy of topics and to see their relationships can assist students in considering the quantity of information they hope to present and the ways in which elements of the presentation will work together.

After using an initial outline to determine the content of the presentation, students may benefit from writing a [full sentence outline](#). As the name implies, a full sentence outline asks students to compose their presentation as if they were presenting it to an audience. While students need

not use the full sentence outline as a script for performance, the opportunity to write and edit the presentation in its near to complete form will assist students in making good decisions about material to include and ways to revise.

Finally, you might recommend that students practice their presentations with a [presentation outline](#). Rather than a full sentence transcript of the presentation, students can have a brief outline of key words and phrases to help them remember the order of presentation. By limiting the words on the page, a presentation outline can help remind students to engage with the audience, and to create and sustain eye contact.

### **Some special considerations for group presentations:**

While group or [team presentations](#) are common in many courses, they can present challenges for accurate and fair assessment. If students divide responsibilities with a group of peers, often the result is a sequence of topically related segments with little evidence of collaboration. This challenge becomes greater if students of varied abilities end up on the same team.

For team presentations, you may consider assigning intermediate writing tasks to check in on the development of the overall presentation. Further, if you wish to encourage students to collaborate across the various segments of a large assignment, you may leave the assignment of speaking roles to chance and ask each student to be prepared to present all sections or assign performance roles the day before.

### **Learn more:**

- MIT Comparative Media Studies, [Adding Oral Presentations](#)
- Michael Alley, [The Assertion Evidence Approach to Scientific Presentations](#)
- University of Pittsburgh, [Speaking in the Disciplines](#)

### **Further support**

Visit us online at <http://writing.umn.edu/tww>. To schedule a phone, email, or face-to-face teaching consultation, [click here](#).

*Our purpose is to provide practical strategies for teaching with writing. Our goal is to offer timely and pragmatic support to faculty members and instructors who teach with writing in undergraduate and graduate courses in all disciplinary areas.*