

Evaluating Oral Presentations

1. Assessment criteria for oral presentations must be tied to assignment descriptions

Clarify the situation/expectations for your oral presentation assignment; here are some questions your students may need answers to before they prepare to speak:

- Who is the audience? (real or fictitious?)
 - What level of knowledge can be expected?
 - How careful do I need to be with technical language?
 - What level of engagement will they bring to the presentation?

- What is the level of formality?
 - What level of structure is required?
 - What level of vocabulary is required?
 - Is there a dress code?
 - Will I speak standing or seated?
 - If it is a group presentation, how formal do our transitions from speaker to speaker need to be?

- How firm is the time limit? Will I be given cues?
- Are visual aids expected? What type? Will there be assistance with equipment? Can I do a demonstration?
- Will someone else introduce me?
- Will questions be asked during the presentation or after?

2. “The medium is the message” says Marshal McLuhan: beware of assessment systems that force a separation between delivery and content for evaluation.

- As Ray Dearin said, “a speech is not simply a paper standing on its hind legs”.
- A speech is one dynamic moment of interaction; the audience has one opportunity to get the message.
- We can articulate the expectations with grading rubrics and give feedback through that means, but the organic nature of the speaking situation forces our attention to the fact that we can’t learn from or agree with the content if we can’t hear it because the rate is too fast, the volume too low, the word choices too technical, or the verbal and non-verbal clutter too distracting.
- Public Speaking even without a traditional visual aid is multimodal communication.

3. Four recommendations for oral assignments in your courses

- Write the assignment in a way that helps students meet your expectations.
- Provide feedback that addresses the integrated nature of content and delivery.
- Videotape presentations, give students the tapes and have them write responses to them.
- Use a feedback form that matches the goals, expectations and the description of your assignment.