

GENERAL TIPS FOR IMPROVING YOUR PRESENTATIONS

There is a lot to keep in mind when preparing a presentation, so remember to give yourself plenty of time to think about what you will say to your audience. The Speaking Center has a variety of handouts available outside of the center and on the web site (www.usm.edu/speaking-center) that will help you get ready for your presentation. This guide is a brief introduction to some of the best speaking tips.

Planning your Presentation

- If you are presenting a paper, **start planning** your presentation when you begin writing the paper. Think about the differences between writing and speaking and what parts of the paper will work well in the presentation.
- **Create a speaking outline** that is different than your writing outline. You will need to reorganize the information for the presentation, making sure that the audience can follow your argument.
- **Translate** for your audience. Don't get wrapped up in your own understanding. Think about who you are speaking to and what type of background information they do or do not need.
- **Use support material** to keep your audience interested. Develop your ideas with stories, examples, vivid descriptions, statistics, etc. Don't forget to orally cite these sources as well.
- **Start and end with a bang**. If you seem bored while speaking, your audience certainly won't be interested in listening to you. Have an interesting and well-practiced introduction and conclusion ready to go. Start and end with good energy, eye contact, and volume.
- **Don't use a visual aid** (PowerPoint, Prezi, etc.) unless you need it. If it doesn't add something to the speech, there's no reason to use it.

Practicing your Presentation

- **Practice** your speech in front of someone else. They will be able to give you feedback and assure you that you are communicating effectively. Also, remember that the Speaking Center has space for you to practice your speech by yourself or with a tutor.
- **Do not read** your speech. Practice makes permanent, so if you are reading your speech when you practice you will most likely read it in front of your audience. Sketch out an outline for the speech and talk to your audience based on that outline. This outline should consist of signal phrases, quotations, cues, etc. For particularly complicated parts, you can read small sections. This takes practice, so give yourself plenty of time to work on practicing the presentation.

- **Time your presentation** while practicing. Make sure that you know the time limits/expectations for the speaking occasion and that you stick to them. Also, be aware that different people react in different ways to nervousness. Some people add more to their speech when nervous, while others speed through their presentations.
- **Record yourself** when practicing. Use a video camera or a voice recorder to hear how you might sound to the audience. This will also allow you to catch any excessive vocal fillers (um, uh, like, etc.) or long pauses.
- **Seek feedback while practicing** Having a trusted friend, classmate, spouse, or speaking center consultant give feedback can help immensely. They can draw your attention to things you are doing well and what needs improvement.

Presenting Your Speech

- **Take note of your appearance** on the day of the presentation. Think about what you are wearing (some suggest dressing one step above your audience), how you are standing, how you are using hand gestures, etc.
- **Deal with nervousness** by being well-prepared, visualizing yourself giving a successful speech, and taking deep breaths.
- **Speak up!** Volume makes you appear to be more confident (even when your stomach is doing flip-flops) and can make that shaky voice go away. Don't forget to breathe—it makes all the difference.