

Questions to Ask Yourself When Preparing an Oral Presentations

1. Confidence

What is the source of your anxiety? If it is about the content of your talk, how can you build confidence in your material or claims?

Are you anxious about the audience? If so, how can you use the style of your presentation to build their trust in your ideas?

How can you re-frame your own perception of the audience? (Don't forget – there are a lot of different people in your audience, with lots of different interests and values).

How does this talk relate to your passions, beliefs, values, or desires? Why do you *need* to give this talk? (Try to move beyond “because I have to.” Tell yourself why this talk matters *to you*.)

2. Clarity

What is the problem that you are addressing in this talk? (Think of it as a *problem* – not a topic or issue, because problems need *solutions*). What is the tension, complication, or question that forms the basis for your talk? State that problem succinctly. Give an indication of why this problem is relevant to the audience.

How have other critics thought about this problem OR tried to solve this problem? (Give us a brief sense of the ongoing conversation about this issue – give us the context that we would need to think about this problem).

What is your evidence, how will it support your argument, and why did you choose this evidence?

What is your argument? Be succinct and clear – what is the major, significant claim (the *new idea*) in your work? In short, what is your solution to the problem you have identified?

Why does your argument make a difference in the ongoing conversation(s) about this problem?

What do you want the audience to believe, accept, or take away once you have proven your argument?

3. Connection

Who is your audience? Why should they care about this problem? How can you intensify their interest? (Identify at least three *different* ways that an audience could connect to the *content* of your talk.) Perhaps they have interests, goals, values, beliefs, desires, or needs which you can identify and address.

How can you use your talk to provoke the audience? In what ways do you and the audience *not* share the same interests, goals, values, needs, or ideals? How can you use these differences to generate their engagement?

4. Narrative

What is the story you are telling about your material? Who/what are the characters in your story? What obstacles have they/we faced?

How can you add drama, suspense, and conflict to the way you tell the story? (This can be very useful even in

the most data-driven talk – shift your story from the *data* to the way other people have interpreted the data. Then, you and your data become the hero in this story).

What is the beginning, middle, and end to the story of your talk?

How can you begin and end in an *unexpected* or *surprising* (but logical) place? Brainstorm at least *three different* beginnings *and* endings to your talk and determine which will be the most compelling.

4. Remember:

Audience and context will usually determine your tone and style of presentation. Try to get as much information you can about the conventions for the context of your presentation. Do your research about the style!

But there is always room for creativity. Find out how many *different* ways there are for you to accomplish the basic tasks of the talk. Then, start to get creative – how can you spice up your presentation to distinguish it from all the others?

PLEASE REMEMBER: *Everyone hates boring presentations.* Try to think about what causes boredom in your presentation-context and brainstorm ways to alleviate it.

Here's the truth: even presentations that *attempt and fail* to be lively are more enjoyable to watch/listen than ones that do not make the attempt at all. The audience will *always* appreciate your effort to connect with them.

Whenever you are stuck, go back to the two basics: you have interesting material, and you wish to share it with others. You are offering them a gift. Like with any gift, you want to give pleasure and surprise; you want to show the receiver that you understand them.
