



Center for Writing and Speaking

P NO. 15 IN THE CENTER FOR WRITING AND SPEAKING HANDOUT SERIES

Presenting a Paper

When preparing to present a paper, it is important to remember that papers and presentations have different goals and audiences. Papers use meticulous research and detail to back the overall claim; presentations should explain only an overview of this research in the context of the big picture. Therefore, the presentation should be very different from your paper, so you have to be open to omitting unessential details or using a different structure for the presentation than you did for the paper itself. The two biggest mistakes that presenters make when transitioning between paper and presentation are failing to translate for the audience and failing to engage the audience.

Translating for your Audience

- Look with a critical eye at the introduction. Many times, the written introduction doesn't come across as strongly when spoken. Think about a way to "hook" your audience from the beginning, and explicitly state your purpose for the presentation.
- Include a clear preview (different from the thesis) at the end of your introduction. Tell the audience what you will talk about in the appropriate order—think of it as a roadmap. You might also indicate what parts of the paper you have chosen to eliminate in the presentation and indicate that you'd be happy to discuss those parts in question/answer.
- Include strong transitions that help the audience follow along exactly where you are in the argument's progression.
- It's not easy, but you'll need to cut out a lot of your paper for the presentation. To some degree, what's necessary to keep will depend on your discipline, but in general the emphasis should be on cutting out detail in favor of the overarching argument. For example, the literature review or research methods section can often be significantly abridged to best serve your needs. Ask yourself, "What is the *core* of my paper? What parts can be taken out without weakening my argument?"
- For science/social science papers, audiences often want to hear a justification of the study, a brief description of how you set the study up, and a complete description of your findings/conclusions. For humanities, audiences generally want a justification of the paper, then a good description of your analysis and conclusions. When in doubt, ask your professor about how different sections should transition from paper to presentation.
- Construct a strong conclusion that summarizes your presentation and includes a good closer. Remind the audience of what you want them to take from your presentation. See our Public Speaking ('P') handout on Introductions and Conclusions for suggestions.

(continued on reverse)

AGNES SCOTT



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Presenting a Paper, Continued

Engaging Your Audience

- Many people think that the only delivery option for this type of presentation is to manuscript the speech. Most of the time, this doesn't work well because it prevents the speaker from engaging fully with the audience. Instead, try planning your speech with a thorough outline and talk to your audience based on that outline. If you do decide to manuscript your speech, be sure to practice in order to sound conversational and leave points in the manuscript where you can elaborate or improvise.
- Pique the audience's interest by sharing your personal story about how you came to the research topic, highlighting stories that emerged during your research, unusual findings, or examples that clarify your arguments. Analogies can be valuable as long as they are clear.
- Think about the differences between written and oral language; written language might come across as too formal when you speak it. Even if you really like the way you worded something in your paper, consider how it would sound in the context of your presentation environment. Clarity is always preferred over being verbose.
- Remember that this is an overview of your argument—you probably need to leave out some of the details, specifics, or terminology. You want the audience to remember your cohesive argument as a whole, not just a summary of your writing.

Check our other CWS Public Speaking handouts to help you continue the process of developing and delivering your presentation.

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