

Oral Presentation Exercises and Assignments for First-Year Writing Courses

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Below you will find a short list of exercises and assignments that Writing Program faculty here at Virginia Tech have used successfully in their first-year writing courses to help students develop their oral presentation skills.

- As an initial experience early in the semester, divide the students into pairs. Have them interview their partners (you can provide a list of specific questions from which they must choose four to ask, for example) and take some quick notes. Then, have the students stand and orally introduce their partners.
- As another early icebreaker, have two or three students a day do short, informal presentations in which they discuss what training and experiences (good or bad) they have already had in making speeches or oral presentations.
- Have the students take turns reading their own writing aloud in class, whether to their small group workshop partners or to the whole class. Help them make eye contact and pay attention to the volume and quality of their voices while reading. This can be done with freewriting, journal assignments, workshop drafts, and final drafts of major assignments.
- Have the students take turns reading the professional text being studied (the essay, the poem, the short story, etc.) aloud in class. Help them make eye contact and pay attention to the volume and quality of their voices while reading.
- Have small groups of students do an interpretive, dramatic reading of the professional text being studied in class. Encourage them to use props, costumes, backdrops, and

musical accompaniment.

- Have the students take turns dramatically reciting poems or song lyrics they have memorized.
- Have small groups or individual students present short grammar lessons, such as "How to Recognize and Fix Comma Splices."
- Have the students freewrite in class (in response to a question on the reading, for instance). Next, have them look over their completed freewriting and jot down two or three keywords from that freewriting on a notecard. Then, call on individuals to present orally the findings from their freewriting using only the keywords on their notecards as prompts.
- After completing a formal writing assignment, have the students present the content of their papers orally. This works both for small, informal kinds of presentations based on shorter papers and for large, formal kinds of presentations based on semester-long research projects.
- Have the students present their research narratives: that is, have each student tell the story of her research process itself, rather than orally present the content of her paper. As a student develops his story about "what happened to me while on the way to finding answers to this question of mine," urge him to focus on one particular source that was of singular importance or interest and to analyze how and why this one particular source was especially meaningful.
- After giving them guidelines about what to do and what not to do, have a student or a small group of students facilitate a whole class discussion of the text or issue at hand for ten to fifteen minutes.
- Divide the class into two equal parts. For the first half of the class, have the first group conduct a formal, seminar-intensity conversation on a subject of your choice for 25 minutes while the second group looks on silently as the audience. Be sure the speaking group understands that you will be silent, too, and they will be on their own.

After a short break, have the groups switch roles.

- Have the students take turns presenting a brief introduction to the reading for the day. This might be a short biography of the professional writer, an enumeration of the questions the student has about the reading, or a discussion of what aspects of the reading the student found most surprising or intriguing, for instance.
- Have the students do oral presentations in which they apply one of the course's secondary readings to a primary text and discuss the relationship(s) between the texts. Question and answer sessions can follow, if you like.
- Have a different student each day start class with an oral synthesis of the previous day's discussion and a question or two to get us started on the day's reading. This could be a two-minute impromptu delivered from brief notes.
- During small group discussion sessions, have group members jot down their best ideas to share with the class; at the end of the discussion period, have one member from each group present the group's findings. Later in the semester, give each group an overhead transparency on which to record its best ideas; at the end of the session, have one member from each group stand in front of the class and use the overhead to present the group's findings.
- Separate the students into groups of five. In each group, one person makes an oral presentation while the remaining four group members each critique one element of the presenter's performance: one evaluates the speaker's content, another her voice, another her eye contact, and the last her gestures and stance. Each group member takes a turn speaking, and the evaluating group members rotate as well so that each person gets a change to critique all four of the elements.