

# Guidelines for Presentations

Prof. Greg Shaya

“You know when you're telling these little stories? Here's a good idea: have a point. It makes it *so* much more interesting for the listener.”—Steve Martin’s character in *Planes, Trains, and Automobiles* (1987)

A good presentation, like a good story, has a point.

The **organization of a good presentation** (whether five or fifty minutes):

- Introduction:
  - An interesting “hook” that draws in your listeners—an anecdote, comparison, quotation, detail, or question that leads to your topic
  - A statement of your topic
  - A statement of your main point or points (your central argument, your thesis) and a brief explanation of what is surprising about it (“It’s common to think... I’d like to suggest, by contrast, that...”)
  - A brief organizational preview of your presentation (“I’m going to point to two kinds of evidence. First... Second...”)
- Body Sections. Your presentation should have a clear internal structure that is easy to follow. For each section of the presentation, you should give:
  - a statement of the main point of the part
  - an example or detail
  - your explanation of how it speaks to your main point
- Conclusion:
  - a recapitulation of your main point or points
  - a conclusion (much as in an essay) that leads listeners to think more about the topic, to think beyond what you have said so far

Keep these **guidelines** in mind:

- It is often easy to overload your presentation with facts, quotations, details, images. A good presentation will present a point of view, then offer up examples and analysis to support this.

Ex. It would not be difficult to offer up twenty dates and a hundred details from Charles Dickens’ life. In and of themselves, these are meaningless. You’ll do much better to offer up an explanation of some aspect of Dickens’ world, then give two or three examples to support it. “Dickens had a difficult childhood which shaped his vision of the world. His father was imprisoned for his debts, and the young Dickens, just 12 years old, was forced to find work to help support his family...”

- Be sure that you define key terms, if they are not obvious to the general reader. You may also devote some of your presentation to presenting essential background.

Ex. “I want to talk about the news reporting of the Tour de France in 1910. But first, let me explain the origins of the most famous bicycle race in the world...”

Write your presentation in outline form or as a set of notecards. Don't read your presentation from a text.

You may choose to bring in visual aids—slides, film clips, a page of quotations, or sock puppets—if they help you deliver your main point.

For **slide shows** or **video presentations** to accompany your talk

- Have a title slide with your name and title and an image
- Do not overload your audience with slides. The pecha kucha model provides for one slide every 20 seconds. This is a maximum. You will often be successful with one slide every minute
- Do not overload your audience with words on the screen. A typical slide should have no more than a few words. There is one exception: if you would like to share a paragraph long quotation or an excerpt from a poem or such. You can only do this once or twice in a short presentation without overtaxing your audience.
- Think of your slide presentation as the visual complement to the story you are telling. Someone flipping through your slides without hearing you should have an idea of what you have to say.

Some **keys to presentation delivery**:

- Speak loudly and clearly enough that all can hear you.
- Be conversational. Talk to us, not at us. Avoid reading and word-for-word memorization.
- Try to make eye contact with members of your audience. Please don't direct your presentation to the professor alone.
- Avoid distracting gestures and habits.
- Stay within the time limit.

All of these will require that you practice your presentation before you give it to the class.