

Designing Oral Assignments

As teachers, we recognize the importance of being able to clearly express our ideas both on paper and in writing. Class presentations give students the opportunity to be exposed to more ideas (when they hear other students talking about their work) and to think through their ideas more carefully when they put their thoughts into a speech. If you are looking for oral assignments beyond the end-of-semester presentations, here are some suggestions:

Debates: Hold formal or informal debates in class. Depending on the assignment, these can be graded based on content and delivery. For more information about different debate possibilities, see the Debate Handout.

Position papers: These can be presented throughout the semester—a low risk, informal presentation of short papers.

Mini debates or counterpoints on position papers: presenting opposing or different viewpoints.

Informal or formal discussions of projects in progress: this helps to stimulate class discussion of research and push the project along.

Mini-lectures: covering alternative readings, contemporary connections, or counter-points. Students can sign up for topics early in the semester and the presentations can be spread throughout the semester.

Group presentations: on group projects or special topics.

Current event speech: This is a great way to get students involved in class and interested in current events. Have them research the latest happenings in course-related areas and present that information. You can assign these throughout the semester (so that it doesn't take up large portions of your semester schedule) and stimulate discussion. Here are the guidelines that I use for this speech:

Assignment:

1. You must first decide on a current event. The topic must be something that has happened within the last six months (or, if it is an ongoing issue, there has been a recent development). For example, you might choose to talk about recent scientific breakthroughs, changes in social trends, upcoming world events, etc. I would suggest that you analyze your audience, however. They may be very tired of some topics. **[This is where you can be more specific with the topics. Guide them to a good source for topics (specific journals, organizations web sites, etc.)]** Be creative with your topics. We don't want to hear the same speech over and over again. Additionally, please choose a significant current event; your speech will be graded based on topic selection. In other words, the current state of the economy is more significant than the Emmy results. Please submit all topics on Blackboard (see Discussion Board section) by Tuesday, Sept. 27th.

2. You are required to use at least two sources (periodicals or credible internet sources). The source should be cited orally in the speech. It should also appear in the outline and the bibliography. The date on the source should be from the last six months (unless it provides background information).

3. You will be required to turn in a typed outline and bibliography on the day that you speak. You will not be allowed to speak unless you have all of these items. **[This is, of course, optional for the assignment, but I would suggest requiring it.]**

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4. The speech will be extemporaneous. In other words, you will practice ahead of time and speak from a basic outline on note cards. The speech should be between 4 to 5 minutes long. You will be allowed to use 5 3x5 cards (front side only) for this speech. I would suggest scheduling an appointment with the Speaking Center tutors (go to www.usm.edu/speakingcenter) to practice the speech.

5. This should be an informative speech. You are just telling us about what has happened. In other words, do not insert opinion into this speech. **[This is also optional—you may want it to be persuasive.]**

Grading (for more suggestions on grading, see the Grading Oral Presentations handout):

Presented Speech

- Presented speech matched outline
- Sources were cited within the speech
- Introduction included attention-getter, establishment of credibility, introduction to the topic, and preview
- Main points were well developed
- Conclusion included summary and clincher
- Current event was explained clearly
- Good topic selection

Outline and bibliography

- Outline used a clear format
- Outline and bibliography were typed
- Bibliography followed APA or MLA guidelines
- Outline was thorough
- Outline matched presented speech

Delivery

- Speaker had good eye contact with the audience
- Speaker was enthusiastic
- Speaker controlled movement well
- Speaker maintained a confident stance
- Speaker has a conversational speaking style

There are many more possibilities. If you are interested in incorporating oral assignments into your class, but want to develop something more specific, we can meet to discuss your ideas. Contact Wendy Atkins-Sayre, Director of the Speaking Center, at wendy.atkinsayre@usm.edu.

**The University of Southern Mississippi
Speaking Center
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