

Using Oral Assignments in a Large Class

Although you recognize the importance of giving students speaking experiences in class, the challenge of incorporating oral assignments into large classes may be overwhelming. In classes with over 30 students enrolled, it becomes more difficult to find sufficient class time to include class presentations. There are, however, benefits to getting students to speak even in a large class environment. Consider some alternatives to the traditional formal, individual presentations.

Graded speaking assignments for a large classroom

It is more difficult to grade presentations in a large section, but still possible to give students some feedback. It is key, however, to make the presentations brief and the grading simple. For example, you might want to consider using rubrics for grading these presentations. With most of the following assignments, you should consider requiring outlines so that you have a written record of the presentation.

Position papers: These can be presented throughout the semester—a low risk, informal presentation of short papers. Have students respond to readings through a written and/or spoken position statement. The format encourages students to think about the differences between written and oral communication. Additionally, you can spread these out across the semester so that they don't take too much time away from class lecture/discussion time.

Mini debates or counterpoints on position papers: Students present opposing or different viewpoints (especially based on readings). Again, these can be spread out across the semester and can be brief. Because this directly ties into the course material, it also leads to a deeper understanding of the material.

Presenting readings: Have students present a brief critical reading of course materials. This kicks off discussion and gets students to struggle with their own interpretation of the material.

Leading discussions: Give students the opportunity to take over for part of the class period. They can lead the discussion over some of the readings, question other class members, and offer their own interpretations of the material.

Group presentations: These can cover group projects or special topics.

Class summaries: Assign students to lead the class through a brief (5 minute) summary of the ideas from the previous class. If it is not possible to have all students make these presentations, consider using this as one option for a participation grade (including writing, speaking, attendance, etc.)*

Ungraded speaking assignments for a large classroom

If it is not possible to include graded oral assignments, consider getting students to speak in class for a general participation grade or as an ungraded class activity. Although there is no grade involved, if students know that you will call on a certain number of individuals, they are more likely to come to class prepared to speak and will see some of the benefits of putting thought into speaking.

Debates: Hold formal or informal debates in class. Depending on the assignment, these can be graded based on content and delivery. For large classes, however, the debate format can be used as an ungraded activity. For more information about different debate possibilities, see the Debate Handout.

Discussion questions: Have students post discussion questions (on Blackboard or a class blog) or present your own discussion questions at the end of class. For the following class, have students prepare oral answers to those questions. These can be graded or ungraded.

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

Free speaking: You've heard of free writing (start with a question and have students write freely for 1-2 minutes), but free speaking is also an option. Pose questions at the end of class, have students take 30 seconds to jot down their response, and then call on one or two students to share their thoughts (without reading what they have written).

Pairing up. Have students pair up to discuss a given question. After a brief discussion, have one person from the pair share their thoughts with the class.*

**The University of Southern Mississippi
Speaking Center
www.usm.edu/speakingcenter**

*These ideas come from: *Communication Across the UNGC Curriculum: A Guide for Faculty* (2004), Karen Meyers (Ed.)