General Tips for Speaking & Writing

Tips for Speaking:

- If your speech will come from a paper you’ve written, start planning your presentation when you begin writing the paper. Create a speaking outline that is different from your writing outline. Creating a separate outline is important because information from the paper may not work as well as part of a speech, or may need to be reorganized.

- Translate for your audience. Keep in mind that they may already understand some concepts, but need others explained to them.

- Use support material to hold your audience’s interest and back up your claims. Stories, examples, and statistics help, but do not fall back on visual aids like Power Point unless they add something to the speech.

- Start and end with a bang! If you can’t seem excited about your material, your audience certainly won’t be. Have an interesting and well-practiced introduction and conclusion ready to go. Maintain good energy, eye contact, and volume.

- Practice your speech in front of someone else. They will be able to give you feedback and assure you that you are communicating effectively. The Speaking Center staff is always happy to listen to speeches.

- Time your presentation while practicing. Make sure that you know the time limits and expectations for the speaking occasion and that you stick to them. Be aware when you get nervous you may talk more quickly or slowly than you planned.

- Speak up! Volume makes you appear more confident and can even out your shaky voice.

- Record yourself when practicing. Use a video camera (available in the Speaking Center) or a voice recorder to hear how you might sound to the audience. This will also allow you to catch any vocal fillers (um, uh, like, etc.) or long pauses that you may not have otherwise noticed.

- Take note of your appearance on the day of the presentation. Think about what you are wearing (some suggest dressing one step above your audience).

- Be aware of your body language. Notice how you are standing, how you are using hand gestures, etc. Use eye contact. Recording yourself can help you make sure you are able to use movements appropriately.

- Deal with nervousness by being well-prepared, visualizing yourself giving a successful speech, and taking deep breaths.
Tips for Writing:

- First, make sure that you understand the assignment fully. Read and reread the requirements laid out by your syllabus or assignment sheet.

- Communication with your instructor can go a long way toward building a successful paper. Ask about any concerns or confusion that you may have. Never be afraid to ask instructors to clarify their expectations.

- Brainstorm to come up with your paper’s topic, if none has been assigned. Ideally, you’ll want to write your paper about something that you are familiar with, or are at least interested in learning more about.

- Outline your paper’s sections and points. The most basic papers will consist of an Introduction, Body, Conclusion, and Works Cited page, though this may change depending on the class and format.

- Your introduction will lay out the main points. Ask yourself, “What do I want people to learn from this paper?” Avoid using filler language like, “In this paper, I will talk about ______.” Make your points decisively!

- Your body is the real “meat” of the paper, where you will expand on the points from your introduction. This is where you get to really express your ideas and back them up with material from credible sources.

- Your conclusion will reiterate your points, now with the weight of your explanations and proof behind them.

- Your works cited page gives credit to all the sources that you paraphrased and quoted in the body. It is very important that you always carefully cite any resource that you took an idea from. Neglecting to do so constitutes plagiarism, which can lead to a failed paper or even a failed course! Refer to handouts on APA, MLA, Chicago, Turabian, and CBE for more information about proper citation styles.

- Start early and create rough drafts. Have someone else look over your work and provide you with feedback for correction.

- Recognize that some writers have high levels of writing anxiety, which can paralyze them when they sit down to write. If you find yourself procrastinating or purposefully ignoring a writing project, you may need some help with writing anxiety (see our helpful handout on Writing Anxiety too).