Presenting a Paper

To “speak” a paper, you should define a few critical messages that you want your audience to take away from your presentation.

It is important to remember not to read your paper. Written language and oral language uses are different, and your audience may become bored when being read to. The two biggest mistakes that presenters make when making the transition between paper and presentation: failing to translate to your audience and failing to engage your audience.

To be sure that you translate to your audience, ask yourself the following questions:

- What is the core of the paper?
- What parts can be left out and still show the audience to understand the argument? Cut those parts out.
- What are the most interesting parts of my paper for this audience?
- What do you want them to remember after your presentation?
- What are they likely to want to take away from the presentation?
- Why are they listening to your presentation? Make them feel like you are giving them important information in your speech. (It’s important to keep your audience in mind in all stages of the presentation preparation.)

More tips for translating for your audience:

Be sure to change your introduction. Think of a way to pull your audience in from the beginning (a question, short story or a striking statement). Also, let your audience know the purpose for this presentation. This will let them know what you want them to get from your presentation.

Have a clear preview statement at the end of your introduction. This will give your audience an idea of what you will talk about and in what order.

Be sure to include strong transitions that will tell your audience where you are going in the presentation (this will happen every time you change ideas). For more information on transitions, see the Speaking & Writing Center “Transitions” handout (As a general rule, you should use transitions after your introduction, between each main point and before your conclusion).
You will need to cut out a lot of your paper for your presentation. Make a decision about which parts of the paper are most important. If you have a research methods section, this may be the section to cut out.

- For science/social science papers, audiences often want to hear a justification of the study, a brief description of how you set the study up, and a complete description of your findings/conclusions.
- For humanities, audiences generally want a justification of the paper, then a good description of your analysis and conclusions.
- When in doubt, ask your professor for advice on what sections can be eliminated from the presentation.

Have a strong conclusion that summarizes your presentation and has a good closer. This will be a reminder of what you want your audience to take from your presentation.

**Make sure that your speech is engaging:** This involves the delivery, support material and visual aids.

Note on delivery: Many people think that the only delivery option for this type of presentation is the manuscript speech. Instead, you should plan your speech with a thorough outline and talk to your audience based on that outline. With much planning and practice, this is a much better decision for most speakers. If you decide to deliver a manuscript speech, be sure to practice in order to make it sound conversational.

How do you make your audience interested in the speech beyond delivery and visual aids? Make sure that the content of your speech is interesting. You could:

- Share a personal story about how you came to the research topic.
- Highlight interesting stories that emerge during your research, unusual findings, examples that clarify your arguments.
- Use analogies when they can help clarify.
- Think about the differences between oral language and written language. Written language might come across as too stiff when you speak it.
- Remember this is your paper “light”-you might need to leave out some details/specifıcs/terminology. Again, what do you want your audience to remember? Probably not a summary of your paper. Keep that in mind when determining your speech context.

Handout developed by Shanelle Campbell & adapted from the Agnes Scott College Speaking Center Staff.