By definition, Geographers study the earth and describe it. A common approach to describing the earth and the earth processes is orally. Geographers speak in many venues. These can include formal presentations, community groups, peer groups, government agencies, and the like. One of the significant modifiers to any oral presentation in geography is adjusting for your audience. This should be addressed early in the planning phases of any talk. Cultural and political sensitivity apply to almost every subject and there needs to be a conscientious effort to be certain that your presentation is minimally offensive. A few basic themes of geography should be applied to any talk: scope, scale, space, and place. Scope tells us the detail of the study. Scale tells us the size of the study. Space tells us where the study is located. And place tells us the perceptions or values held in that space.

One of the greatest values of geography is our ability to change our breadth and our scope. There are many tools useful to geographers and they should be applied appropriately. We cover many topics including: human, cultural, physical, environmental, technical, historical, etc. Typically, we utilize combinations of several fields to assist in our ontology. Our epistemology is centered on our understanding of space and place. But we must also be concerned and aware that these are dynamic and change from person to person while varying over time. This is why we place the importance on audience in preparation of any talk given as a geographer.

An oral presentation in geography typically consists of three things: a beginning, a middle, and an end.

Beginnings. Often, beginnings include things like an overview of the area, maps for reference, definitions of the scope and scale of the study, general foundations in the literature, and thesis justifications. Of these, the thesis justification or thesis statement should be the most important. This provides the audience with an understanding of the

The basics of speaking are, for the most part, consistent across disciplines. Knowing the expectations of a discipline is an important part of adapting to your audience, however. The papers in the “Speaking, in my opinion…” series do not represent an official statement from the department. They do, however, give you an introduction to different faculty opinions on effective speaking.
purpose of your talk. Founding yourself in the published literature gives you an “authority” to talk about your subject and shows that you have a grasp on the topic at hand. This can include a general overview or history of an area. Our wide field of options for topics will dictate further which other components should be included in your talk.

Middles. The Middles of the talk include things like your methods, results, and any problems occurred in gathering or generating your data. Some topics, like a GIS paper or field report, may end up with a focus on the methods section. Some cultural papers or environmental studies may focus more on the results. The topic often dictates this. But keep in mind the “lens” of your audience, this will ultimately tell you which section should be stressed.

Ends. This is often the most overlooked portion of any talk, especially in undergraduate talks. Ends need to include discussion, conclusions, acknowledgements, and, if necessary, sources. Of these, the most important part is the conclusion. Quite often time management limits how long speakers will spend on their conclusions. This is the “so what?” part of the talk! This is the ultimate purpose of your talk. You should summarize your complete study in a few sentences. And you should do it in a way that makes sense to someone who may have just shown up at the end of your talk. A good rule of thumb for time management is: a third of your time for the beginnings, a third for the middles, and a third for the ends. Sources are sometimes an issue in presentations. I would suggest using parenthetical citations where applicable in the text and illustrations, but I would actually make a final slide of citations and never show them unless asked. The sources slide is usually unnecessary and does not add to your talk so place it after your final slide just in case there is a direct question about the sources.

This is just a start to the experience of speaking in the field of Geography. Keep in mind, as you speak to people in your audience, YOU are the one who has read and studied this topic. Simply state what you have learned or what you theorize. YOU are there to help US out!