Planning

The most important first step in completing your speech is choosing your topic. If you are researching a 20 page paper, your paper topic cannot be the same as your oral presentation. For example, if you are writing an essay on the murder of 3 civil rights activists in Mississippi in 1964, you could talk about James Chaney, or the concept of “freedom summer” or the White Citizens’ Council, etc. Choose a smaller event, an important concept, or turning point that exemplifies an important point from your larger research, rather than trying to cover all of the material. Come up with a basic structure for your talk where you identify for yourself what you want your audience to learn, and then seek out the best material to help them understand and retain the information. Balance factual information with interesting anecdotes or illustrative stories. Have a clear beginning, middle, and end to your speech to make it easier for your audience to follow your train of thought. Make sure you address the 3 A’s: Assignment, Audience, & Achievements.

**Assignment:** What is the nature of your assignment. Is it to inform? Provide a narrative? Build an argument? What approach will best help me convey my point?

**Audience:** What does the audience know about your topic? What don’t they know? Introduce your subject and place it in context.

**Achievements:** How can I signal important points? How can I ensure the overall clarity of my argument? How will I know the audience is listening?

Preparing

A speech is not something you can do off the top of your head, no matter how familiar you are with the material. Nor do you want to write a full script that you simply read off the page. Rather, work toward a sophisticated outline that provides the structure of your speech, your sub-points, and any quoted material. The more anxious you are about public speaking, the more detailed you might want your notes to be. After crafting your speech, practice it to ensure it is the right length, that it covers all the material you want, and that your main point comes across. The best way to do this might be to practice in front of someone else unfamiliar with the topic. Then have them tell you what they thought the speech was about. See if your point came across clearly. You can also practice at the Speaking Center with their staff, and you can even record yourself. Make sure you address the 3 C’s: Connections, Coherence, & Content

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.
**Connections**: Is there a logical flow to your thoughts? Chronology? Cause & effect? Clearly defined problem and answer?

**Coherence**: Is there a clear main point? Do all of your sub-points connect to your larger argument? does your introduction & conclusion frame your argument?

**Content**: Do you provide enough evidence? do you make clear where your evidence comes from? Are you using visual aids in an effective manner?

**Presenting**

On the day of your presentation, you will feel confident you have planned out your topic, prepared your speech, and are now ready to deliver. But your work isn’t over yet. Think about what you are going to wear on the day of your presentation. Many recommend dressing up to make yourself feel more professional; but don’t take it too far. If a tie makes you feel strangled, or you worry about falling over in heels, they will detract from your presentation, rather than add to it. Don’t worry about the speech all day. If you are well prepared, worrying about it during the rest of your classes will only increase your nerves. Try to take your mind off the presentation until you have to deliver. When giving your speech, don’t forget everything you’ve practiced. Ensure you’re speaking loud enough for the room, and actively make eye contact with not only your professor, but students in all areas of the classrooms. Pace yourself— you always think you’re speaking more slowly than you are. Make sure you remember the 3 B’s: Breathe, Body Language, & Be Aware.

**Breathe**: If you find your nerves increasing as you wait to present, breathe slowly to calm yourself down. When speaking, take a breath; it will allow your audience to process the information.

**Body Language**: Hold your outline/ notecards at chest level, and try to look up and around the room. Watch nervous habits like touching your hair, biting your lip, putting hands in pockets etc.

**Be Aware**: Pay attention to the audience & modify accordingly. See people nodding off? Modulate your voice. See confusion? Restate/clarify your point.