



Use these as the building blocks for planning a carefully considered speaking task

Tips for Creating Effective Presentation Assignments

You might know that you want students to create a presentation for your class, but do you know where to start in your assignment planning? Use these tips to help you start creating a solid speaking-based task that provides students with clear instructions.

1. On purpose

Different audiences require different presentation styles, and so do different purposes, so identify the task's audience and purpose. If you expect students to select an audience or purpose as part of their task, be explicit about that. But at a minimum, know the purpose of the task as it relates to your course's intended learning outcomes. In other words: how will this task help students learn what they should learn in your course? How can you help students see that connection to course goals?

2. À la mode

Be clear about what rhetorical mode you prefer. An informative talk will require different structure and approach than does a persuasive one, for example. When writing your assignment instructions, use concrete verbs (e.g. describe, analyze, compare, argue) rather than abstract ones (e.g. talk about, share, explore) to help clarify the task for students.

3. Step by step

Breaking the task into smaller steps (possibly with individual due dates) can be useful, particularly for students with less presentation experience. But even for more advanced students, providing an overview of the suggested process you envision will be useful.

“Teaching Tune-ups” are small but impactful ways for professors to keep consistent pedagogical improvement at the forefront of their teaching practice.

Additional resources

Princeton University.
“[Teaching Oral Presentation Skills to Undergraduates.](#)”
McGraw Center for Teaching and Learning.
N.d.

Quigley, Brooke L.
“[Designing and Grading Oral Communication Assignments.](#)” *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*. 74, (1998): 41-49.

Spencer, Brenda H. and Kathryn Bartle-Angus.
“[The Presentation Assignment: Creating Learning Opportunities for Diverse Student Populations.](#)” *Journal of College Reading and Learning* 30.2 (2000): 182-194. DOI: 10.1080/10790195.2000.10850095

Tsang, Art. “[Enhancing Learners’ Awareness of Oral Presentation \(Delivery\) Skills in the Context of Self-Regulated Learning.](#)” *Active Learning in Higher Education* 21.1 (2020): 39-50. DOI: 10.1177/1469787417731214

4. By the numbers

Students need basic information about assignment requirements: what is the desired format of the talk? What is the expected length of speaking time? What is the deadline? If the task is broken down into steps (an in-class due date for visuals/slides so that students can participate in a peer review could be one step, for instance), make sure to provide clear dates and expectations for each step, too.

5. Did I ask too many questions?

While asking questions can help to guide students’ thinking, long lists of potential questions to answer can overwhelm or mislead students. Open-ended questions in the assignment instructions can lead students to explain and analyze, rather than just memorize and repeat, but try to include just one (or perhaps two) such questions.

6. Avoid mystery with criteria

One effective way to express your expectations is through the use of criteria. You might give the characteristics of what constitutes a minimum passing mark for the task, and then (at the feedback and/or assessment stages) let students know where they exceed that minimum mark and where they fall short. Use the criteria when introducing the assignment so that students know from the start what is expected of their finished presentation.

7. Tools are cool

Provide resources, as appropriate, to help students successfully complete the task. Suggest helpful journals or books on the content, provide links to videos of presentations in the mode that you have assigned, or give students sound advice about presentation planning and delivery from respectable sources. If you need help finding more tools, seek additional help from the Center for Teaching and Learning.