

2-Minute ORAL PRESENTATION



The talk should run approximately two minutes.

Practice carefully: many talks run *much* longer than speakers expect. What is two minutes (or even less) in a practice session can turn into a four-minute talk in class if the speaker slows down even slightly or adds even short elaborations or basic explanations.

** If you reach 2 ½ minutes, you will be signaled to end – and you *must* end (with an appropriate sentence or two, not with “that’s it” or “I’m done” . . . or nothing).



The talk should focus on a) identifying your topic, b) providing your central question, and c) identifying the primary sources that support it.

Path: Feel free to personalize your presentation by *briefly* noting (in a sentence or two) how you reached your topic and focus (a course, an encyclopedia, a member of the faculty, a secondary source?).

Topic/Question: Define your topic *precisely and concisely*, remembering to include basic identifications and information (such as time period and location).

Sources: Note what key primary sources support your project.



The talk should be personal but clearly organized.

Just because you are discussing you, do not turn the talk into a first-person, unstructured story. Do not use “stream of consciousness.”

Organize your talk with a brief (potentially just one or two sentences) basic **introduction** that indicates talk’s point and coverage.

Suggestion: Begin with something other than “my topic is” A question or fact or statistic can “hook” your audience at the same time that it provides an important link to your topic.

End with an explicit, brief (potentially just one or two sentences) **conclusion** so that the audience can “pull it all together.” Do NOT end with “that’s it” or “I’m done” or an out-of-the-blue “Questions?” And do not simply stop.

Suggestion: How did you start your talk? Bring up that point again. (For example, if you began with why you are interested in the Civil War, consider ending with a comment about how you expect your project to increase that interest and, you hope, make the class interested as well.)



The organization of the talk should be clearly set up in the introduction, e.g., “I will cover three major points: first, my topic; second, my central question; and third, my key primary sources.”

In what follows, make it clear when you are moving to each succeeding point (e.g., “Next my main primary sources . . .”).

This organization should, of course, be reflected in your notes.



Presenters must stand at the front of the class. Use of the podium/table is optional but discouraged.

Logically, then, students should practice in the room using the same arrangement.

Consider how to stand, move around, gesture, and handle notes.

Practice not holding/waving/flipping your notes.

Practice room-wide eye contact; many students look mainly at one side of the room or just at the instructor.



Dress appropriately.

However short, the talk is a formal class requirement.

Send the right message to your audience: you are taking your talk seriously, and your audience should take you and what you have to say seriously.

Choose something comfortable but, for most students, something “better” than the usual is necessary.



Do not use visual aids (e.g., power point); save that for the four-minute talk.

NOTES

Never forget the importance of *good notes*, i.e., ones that (1) will get you through any situation if you get lost or distracted but that (2) will do so without compelling you to overuse (even read) them. In other words, be thorough but rely on **key words and phrases**. **YOU MAY NOT READ YOUR TALK, & YOU SHOULD NOT MEMORIZE IT.**

**You want to connect with your audience;
you need to talk *to*—not *at*—them.**

NOTE: Even if you do not expect to use them, you *must* prepare and turn in notes.

Good notes will help you plan and organize your talk. Use them to keep your ideas and information focused.

Consider not only the usefulness and appropriateness of your notes but also how you handle them during your talk.

- ✿ Turn in notes at the end of class.



Be prepared to comment *briefly* on classmates' presentations.

When asked what you liked and what you recommend for improvement, say something. Provide feedback. *Help your classmates.*



Keep in mind that the class will probably know little about your person/ event/issue studied. The class will need more help than **“my topic is reaction to the Dred Scott case”** to understand your topic.

“Hook” your audience and set up your talk: **“Since the seventh grade, I have been interested in the causes of the Civil War. Thus, my topic is reaction to the Dred Scott case.”**

Then provide brief clarification, e.g., **“Dred Scott is the 1857 Supreme Court case which held, among other things, that blacks were not citizens of the United States and had ‘no right that the white man is bound to respect.’ As a result, it further increased tensions between North and South and is often seen as a cause of the Civil War.”**

Indicate your talk’s organization. For example, **“Today, I am going to present my research question and my primary source.”**

Then, as precisely as possible identify your specific focus. For example, **“My research question is ‘how did two men who would run for president in 1860 react to the 1857 ruling.’ Those two men were Senator Stephen Douglas, a Democrat from Illinois, and Abraham Lincoln, a member of the brand new Republican Party who was seeking Douglas’s Senate seat.”**

Finally, identify primary sources. For example: **“I will narrow the topic further by focusing on the speeches of the two men during their famous ‘Lincoln-Douglas Debate’ as they campaigned for the Senate.”**

Conclude. For example: **“Using these speeches, I will make clear that the divisions over slavery, race, and national-versus-state power which split the country in 1860-1861 were splitting even its most capable political leaders.”**

Just the highlighted comments above add up to 1 minute and 40 seconds, thus suggesting how little fits into two minutes . . . and how easy it can be to run significantly over two minutes. However, the highlighted comments also suggest how much information can be provided if the speaker is precise and focused.

