

Giving your presentation: suggestions and guidelines

In most cases, I'll be asking you to do some research or extra reading related to the text -- suggestions for what that might be are welcome. Possibilities would include historical context, the author's biography, contemporary responses, intellectual backgrounds, other writing by the author, modern criticism. The material you read and present should be 1/ relevant and 2/ of manageable size. The headings below are guidelines both for how to prepare and also for how to present the material in class

1. What do we want to find out about? Here, you identify an area of inquiry; framing your research in terms of a question can help to ensure that it will be relevant in some way to the reading.

- Group 1 is asking how different readerships reacted to Stowe's novel.

2. What material are we looking at? Here, give the basic information about your material: who, what, when, where.

- Group 1 will be talking about reviews of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in the North, in the South, overseas, and in the African-American community.

3. Describing the material.

- Group 1: for each review, you'll want to give an overview (the reviewer did or didn't like the book), provide some detail (what they liked or didn't like and why), and identify what is most interesting about this particular review (most insightful, most surprising, most striking).

4. Summing things up. Here, you return to a broader perspective, pointing out connections which the audience may have not yet made themselves, and reiterating any key ideas you would like them to remember.

- Group 1: what are the major points of convergence between these different reviews -- are there things on which they all agree? On what points do they differ the most?

5. Opening a discussion. Here, you pose some questions which open up a wider discussion, so that 1/ your ideas can be sharpened, clarified and extended through audience questions and feedback and 2/ the audience can absorb the material in a deeper way by working with it actively as well as listening passively. Broadly speaking, there are two kinds of questions to ask, and you might try to think of a couple from each category. The first kind relates the material you've presented back to the text, as in the example below.

- Group 1: think about which scenes from the novel, or aspects of Stowe's writing, seemed important to the different reviewers. For a couple of specific cases, does your audience agree with the reviewer's assessment?

The second kind are questions you yourselves want to raise about the text, questions which may be more general. When you ask these more general questions, a couple of things may happen.

- One or more people respond right away.
- Nobody responds.

If people are responding to the question, let them say what they have to say. If you can, try rephrasing their points -- to make sure you've understood, and also that other people got the gist of it -- and ask what other people think. What do you think? If you want, one person in the group can write major points or questions on the board as the discussion proceeds. If people are not responding to the question, one of you can rephrase it, perhaps adding something about why you wanted to ask this question: "we wondered about this because ... so the question is ...". In either case, try to have in mind a passage from the text which is associated with your question. If the discussion is slow, looking at the text can help people come up with ideas about the questions are raising; if the discussion is lively, people can test their ideas against a particular passage, to refine, confirm, or modify them.

6. General points.

- Make yourself understood: speak more slowly and carefully and at higher volume than you would normally. It's also a good idea to speak simply, using simpler language and sentence construction than you might if you were writing. Make your initial point briefly and in simple language, elaborating on it afterwards if necessary -- the previous sentence is an example of how this strategy works.
- Use notes: planning to speak extemporaneously is a big gamble, but simply reading a prepared text can be a bore. Bring some notes with reminders of your major points, details of specific information, and maybe some written text to fall back on if you get stuck. *Don't* leave home without them, no matter how well you know your material -- even (and sometimes especially) the well-informed have been known to panic and forget where they're going with that idea.
- Use the board: a good place for names, dates, and (if you like) major points.
- Be concise: you don't have to talk for the whole class! Say what you have to say clearly, make sure it's understood, show why it matters, then relax and see what people think.