

WAC Writing Guides

Presentations

Adapted from Practical Argument: A Text and Anthology by Laurie Kirschner and Stephen Mandell

- Just like written arguments, oral presentations/arguments should have a thesis or main idea. The thesis should be debatable. You do not want to simply preach to the choir. That is, you don't want to make an argument that is too familiar or that most people would generally agree with. For example, it would NOT be effective to argue that killing is wrong. Instead, you might argue that killing is justifiable during times of war. Of course, like any debatable thesis, you could also argue against killing, even during times of war.
- An oral argument should present a clear introduction, body, and conclusion. The introduction should have a "hook," something that grabs the audience's attention and keeps them interested in your topic. The body should present evidence to support your thesis. And finally, the conclusion should reiterate your main points and perhaps shed new light on your argument. Don't simply end your speech when you've finished presenting your evidence. Let your audience know why your argument is relevant or why your topic matters.
- Gather support for your thesis – use facts, observations, expert opinions, statistics, personal anecdotes, etc. Oral arguments are often accompanied by visuals, such as slides presenting graphs or images that illustrate your point.
- Acknowledge your sources. All information that you gather from your research should be documented. By using credible sources and by letting your listeners know where you got your information, you increase your own credibility.
- Know your audience. A speech you make for a broad audience will be different than a speech you make for a narrow one. For example, if you were a doctor speaking to your colleagues and you were making a speech about a new treatment for brain tumors, you could use the technical jargon of your field. However, if you were a doctor giving your speech to a large group of laypeople, you would modify your word choice so your audience could understand you.
- Like in written arguments, oral arguments should contain verbal signals to help guide your listeners. In writing, these signals are called transitions.
- Use simple, direct language and avoid long sentences. Using elevated language will make it difficult for listeners to follow your point. Your sentences should be straightforward and easy to understand.
- Oral arguments should repeat key information. Tell your listener what you're going to talk about, talk about it, and finally, repeat your key points. You can also use repetition as a stylistic tool. Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech is an excellent example of this technique.