Guidelines for Preparing and Delivering a Good Presentation

Have Focus and Substance
Strong presentations have a clear focus and an obvious sense of purpose. They should be robust, and provide substantive information for the audience. You should assume your audience knows little or nothing about your work. Provide context, and help guide the audience through the salient findings and implications, and the impact they have had on your work at Smith.

Be familiar with the guidelines for Collaborations presentations. Be aware of how long you have for your presentation. Often, students find they do not have as much time as they’d like to squeeze in all they have learned!! You don’t want to talk about everything; rather, you want to have a clear purpose for your presentation. When preparing your presentation, you should have an outline that provides organization and focus.

Hint! Don’t write out an essay that you will simply read. This will disconnect you from your audience. Your goal is to be engaging and informative. Use note cards or a written outline with key words to help you stay on track and focused.

Provide framing. Begin your presentation by orienting your audience to your main point. Provide a meaningful introduction. What is the goal of your talk? What are the main points you will be discussing?

Be selective. You should focus on key aspects of your research – the salient findings, ones that provided “ah-ha” moments, or shifted they way you thought about a particular issue or problem. With that, you should also illustrate these points with examples, anecdotes, and detail. Remember, you should assume the audience doesn’t know anything about your work. Here are a few questions that may help guide you:

- What is the most significant aspect of your work that you want to convey?
- What was the most surprising part of the work you did?
- How did your perceptions of the field, work, topic, or people shift as a result of your experience?
- What critical issues were you seeking to exploreunpackinvestigate?
- What questions still remain unanswered?
- How has your work impacted your academic interests and future research?
Practice makes perfect!

- Craft an outline of your comments. Build your presentation from that – be it your PowerPoint slides, audio visual aids, or simply your remarks.
- Practice delivering your presentation MANY, MANY TIMES! The more you practice, the more comfortable you will be delivering it in front of an audience.
- Time yourself.
- Do a practice presentation at the CDO! This will be an opportunity to present in front of someone, and to receive feedback on how to strengthen the presentation.

**Hint:** Interact with the audience. Make eye contact with them and talk to them. Sometimes, asking them questions to help make a point helps to draw them in.

Thoughts on Visual Aids

Visual aids such as PowerPoint can help engage an audience in your thoughts and ideas. They can draw attention to salient points, such as statistics or images. They aren’t necessary, but can be helpful. They are NOT designed to be the text of your talk. Rather, they are tools designed to support your words.

PowerPoint Suggestions:

- Use only a few slides. You don’t want to overwhelm your audience or distract them from what you are saying with a lot of visual material to absorb.
- Don’t use a lot of text and don’t read text from the slide. Slides should be easy to see and visually interesting. Using images, pictures, graphs, etc. along with text helps to bring depth to a slide.
- Check your technology! Be sure you have practiced talking and clicking through your slides, and be sure images and graphs work.

**Hint:** Anticipate the worst! Be prepared to give your presentation if your technology fails. Bring copies of your PowerPoint slides in handout format to distribute to the audience.