A Guide to Teaching Oral Communication Online

Individual Presentations, Group Presentations, and Student-Facilitated Discussions as Hybrid or Online Assignments

This Guide offers strategies for revising three common oral communication assignments—individual presentations, group presentations, and student-facilitated discussions—for distance and hybrid learning.

For course-specific oral communication consultation, training, or support, contact professor Sarah Ryan, Shapiro Center for Writing at Wesleyan University (sryan@wes). For technology assistance, contact Wesleyan’s Information Technology Services. For remote teaching resources, see the Center for Pedagogical Innovation (CPI) website. See also, A Guide to Teaching Writing Online by Tess Bird, Mellon Fellow in Writing for the Social Sciences 2020.

Individual Presentations  
(Note: underlined text is hyperlinked)

1. Revisit the purpose of the assignment. Consider these eight questions:


2. Where should students go to view an example of this presentation format?

3. Which capacities should students develop and/or demonstrate? Content/concept mastery, organization, evidentiary support, language use, delivery (verbal/nonverbal), persuasion, etc.

4. Who is the audience—real or imagined—for the speech? Nonprofit board of directors, investors...

5. What is the rhetorical situation, or socio-political context, for the speech? The speaker is a... seasoned executive director who is meeting new nonprofit board members via Zoom. Individual donations to the nonprofit declined 18% last quarter, which was consistent with a nationwide decline in charitable giving.

Compiled by Sarah Ryan,  
Assoc. Prof. of Practice in Oral Communication, 2020
6. What are the parameters of the speech assignment? Time limits, content requirements, delivery expectations, visual/graph/chart elements, etc.; What categories would you include on an assessment/evaluation rubric?

7. What challenges might on- and off-campus students face in completing the assignment? How will on- and off-campus students deliver, access, and respond to the presentations? For more on universal design for learning, contact professor Amy Grillo.

8. Given the above, what are the learning goal(s) and outcome(s) of the speech/presentation assignment? Is writing, speaking, or content knowledge paramount?

2 Determine the Minimum Requirements for Your Teaching & Your Students’ Performance

Consider which strategies (e.g., asynchronous), platforms (e.g., mobile-friendly), reading materials, etc. can be developed efficiently to convey information effectively. This baseline will anchor but not determine your pedagogy. You will likely do more to foster community among your students than your initial plan dictates.

Similarly, determine the minimum requirements for student performance. While computer-generated, animated visual aids might be typical in your field, a hand-drawn illustration might suffice to demonstrate a student’s understanding of a concept. Often, individual choice will facilitate equity. Permitting students to submit a link to a video file saved in Google drive will accommodate international students who cannot access and upload files to YouTube.

3 Build out the Assignment for Multi-week Delivery

Consider the “see one, do one, teach one” method:

a. “See one:” semester weeks 8-9, students watch example speeches and discuss their strengths and weaknesses using criteria provided by the instructor such as organization, evidentiary support, language use, delivery (verbal/nonverbal), persuasion, etc.;

b. “Do one:” semester weeks 10-12, students meet with the professor and/or Wesleyan’s Presentation Studio Mentors to discuss their presentations. Student then post links to their finalized presentations in a Moodle forum or deliver the speeches synchronously to classmates;

c. “Teach one:” semester weeks 13-14, students comment on each other’s speeches as presentation coaches/mentors (using strengths/weaknesses/criteria that they develop or the instructor provides).

As a best practice for remote or hybrid teaching, communicate the format, requirements, and supporting resources for the presentation assignment in multiple places. Build in redundancy and announce the requirements in your syllabus, a weekly ‘overview’ or ‘read first’ document, emails, etc.

4 Assess Meaningfully

Presentation assignments are often best assessed via a rubric that reflects the learning goal(s) and permits some narrative feedback.
**Group Presentations**  (Note: underlined text is hyperlinked)

1. Revisit the purpose of the assignment. Consider these five questions:

   1. Why are students working and presenting in groups rather than individually? For more on project-based learning, contact CPI Director Jen Rose.

   2. Which capacities should students develop and/or demonstrate? Content/concept mastery, managing interpersonal conflict and group norm-development; working in discipline/field-specific teams (e.g., Info. Systems teams); learning from and/or leading teammates; managing remote and hybrid meetings; project management (e.g., time planning tools), etc.

   3. What are the parameters of the group presentation? Time limits, content requirements, delivery expectations, visual/graph/chart elements; What categories would you include on an assessment/evaluation rubric?

   4. What challenges might on- and off-campus students face in completing group work and delivering the group presentation? What inequity, interpersonal communication, work quality, and technology issues/challenges are likely? For more on universal design for learning, contact professor Amy Grillo.

   5. Given the above, what are the learning goal(s) and outcome(s) of the group presentation?

2. **Determine the Minimum Requirements for Your Teaching & Your Students’ Performance, as described above (see #2 above).**

3. **Build out the Assignment for Multi-week Delivery**

   Consider a scaffolded/sub-divided assignment design with individual assignments, group assignments, and designated leaders.

   Initially, divide the group project into a series of smaller tasks/deliverables. Then, for each smaller task, specify: 1. an individual draft assignment, 2. a group deliverable/assignment, and 3. a team leader.

   a. Sub-assignment 1: semester week 4, by Tuesday all students post their individual 1-page write-ups for sub-assignment 1; by Friday, the group meets and completes the team’s sub-assignment 1 (using the individual assignments as springboards); team member A is this week’s leader;

   b. Sub-assignment 2: semester week 5, by Tuesday…; by Friday…; team member B is … leader;

   c. Sub-assignment 3: semester week 6, by Tuesday…; by Friday…; team member C is … leader;

   d. Sub-assignment 4: semester week 7, by Tuesday…; by Friday…; team member D is … leader;

   e. Presentation: semester week 8, team revises project, **rehearses, and delivers** team presentation.

   [f. Optional additional weeks: peer reviewing week; presentation revision week, etc.]
Assess Meaningfully

Consider assessing individual and group process, performance, and learning. Use anonymous teammate assessments cautiously—or not at all—as they can be biased and unreliable.

**Student-facilitated Discussions** (Note: underlined text is hyperlinked)

1. Revisit the purpose of the assignment. Consider these five questions:

1. Why are students leading these discussions?

2. Which capacities should students develop and/or demonstrate? Academic reading/article dissection, content/concept mastery, agenda-development, inclusive facilitation, active listening, etc.

3. What are the parameters of the student-facilitated discussion? Time limits, content requirements, facilitator documentation (e.g., agenda), facilitation requirements (e.g., must get each student to participate once); What categories would you include on an assessment/evaluation rubric?

4. What challenges might on- and off-campus students face in facilitating or participating in a student-facilitated discussion? What inequity, interpersonal communication, work quality, and technology issues/challenges are likely? For more on universal design for learning, contact professor Amy Grillo.

5. Given the above, what are the learning goal(s) and outcome(s) of the group presentation?

2. Determine the Minimum Requirements for Your Teaching & Your Students’ Performance, as described above (see the first #2, above).

3. Build out the Assignment for Multi-week Delivery

Consider the “see one, do one, teach one” method:

a. “See one” semester week 3, you facilitate a discussion. Then, you lead a separate meta-discussion or provide a video outlining how you prepare for, lead, course-correct, and assess class discussions;

b. “Do one” semester weeks 4-6, each student facilitates a small group discussion; and

c. “Teach one” semester week 7, students write short papers about their experiences as facilitators and participants. Then, they create a best practices wiki or shared document.

4. Assess Meaningfully

Consider a portfolio assessment of (1) preparation documents (agenda, annotated journal article, handouts to classmates) and (2) a post-facilitation reflection paper. For smaller classes or in-depth assessment, provide feedback on the discussions (that you attend or watch via video recording). Use anonymous peer assessments cautiously—or not at all—as they can be biased and unreliable.
Further Readings and Resources | Works Cited

Mt. Holyoke Speaking, Arguing, & Writing (SAW) Program, “How to Use and Evaluate Student Speaking & Oral Presentations in the Classroom.”

Pat Gehrke, Quick Tips for Mid-Semester Transfer of Offline Classes to Online [including specific advice for online presentation assignments]

Wesleyan University, Center for Pedagogical Innovation, “Presentation Tips and Resources,” https://www.wesleyan.edu/cpi/presentations/Tips%20and%20Resources.html