



SAINT MARY'S
UNIVERSITY SINCE 1802

COUNSELLING
CENTRE
STUDENT SERVICES

Tips for Effective (and less stressful) Presentations

- **Practice, practice, practice!** The more confident you are that you know your material, the less stress you will feel. When practicing, make the situation as close to possible to how it will be in the classroom. Stand up, decide how you will hold your hands, place your note cards, etc. Ask a friend or classmate to offer feedback or practice in front of a mirror to take note of your own mannerisms and facial expressions.
- **Visualize success!** Leading up to the presentation (for a few days at least), practice relaxation techniques, close your eyes and imagine how the presentation will go. Picture yourself feeling confident and speaking clearly. Imagine the room, the other students, your professor.
- **Use positive affirmations.** Make sure the messages you are sending yourself are positive and helpful (for example, “I am calm and confident. I speak clearly. I am knowledgeable about this topic. I will do just fine.”)
- **Practice self-care** leading up to the presentation. Eat a light, healthy meal; avoid caffeine; take a bathroom break; sip on water; get plenty of sleep.
- **Deep breathing** helps so much in reducing stress. Take some deep breaths from the diaphragm to get fresh oxygenated air to your brain – this helps improve your memory and recall and also stimulates the relaxation response in the body.
- **Slow Down** – Nervous and inexperienced speakers tend to talk way too fast. Consciously slow your speech down and add pauses for emphasis. It may sound a bit strange to you at first, but will become more natural the more you practice.
- **15 Word Summary** – Can you summarize your idea in fifteen words? If not, rewrite it and try again. Speaking is an inefficient medium for communicating

information, so know what the important fifteen words are so they can be repeated.

- **Don't Read** – This one is a no brainer, but somehow PowerPoint makes people think they can get away with it. It's okay to have a few bullet points written on a cue card to jog your memory, but avoid having full sheets of information if at all possible. This helps you avoid the temptation to read directly and also hides shaky hands from the audience.
- **Project Your Voice** - Nothing is worse than a speaker you can't hear. Even in the high-tech world of microphones and amplifiers, you need to be heard. Projecting your voice doesn't mean yelling, rather standing up straight and letting your voice resonate on the air in your lungs rather than in the throat to produce a clearer sound.
- **"That's a Good Question"** – You can use statements like, "that's a really good question," or "I'm glad you asked me that," to buy yourself a few moments to organize your response. Will the other people in the audience know you are using these filler sentences to reorder your thoughts? Probably not. And even if they do, it still makes the presentation smoother than um's and ah's littering your answer.
- **Arrive Early** – Don't fumble with PowerPoint or hooking up a projector when people are waiting for you to speak. Come early, scope out the room, run through your slideshow and make sure there won't be any glitches. Preparation can do a lot to remove your speaking anxiety. This also gives you time to find a "safe spot". Make sure if you plan to move around a bit there is nothing in the way that could cause you to trip (i.e. chairs, cords, other people, etc.)