

Here, then, are the somewhat – but not too – belated guidelines for your oral presentation.

First, though, some contextualization of the assignment: the impulse behind the assignments in this course is that they be useful in multiple ways. In other words, in addition to setting the stage for class discussion, it would be nice (though not essential) that the work you do on an oral report feeds into something else you do for the class. Consequently, the oral report would ideally set up either your first paper or the bibliography project or the final essay, depending on when you are scheduled to present. There is no compulsion here, and I simply use this example to illustrate my sense of how to make the different assignments in the course cohere and relate to one another (and reduce the different kinds of work you are being asked to do into something manageable and rewarding).

To the assignment itself:

(1) Locate and begin to think about your topic: as the above remarks suggest, you would be well served by having a broad topic or idea in mind that derives from the reading you are presenting on. If your bibliography project comes after the oral report, start doing the research for that project, reading articles or materials relevant to the play and your topic, taking notes as you do so. If your bibliography project precedes the oral report, then clearly you want to try and use that material and other things you have read after turning in the bibliography project for whatever you present to the class.

(2) Stop reading and start thinking: It is very important, in my view, that you stop reading anything really new (barring the discovery of something crucial for your presentation) a couple of days before you are meant to do your report. Those remaining days should be used to construct and shape your report. In other words, you need not to read something additional, but to think about what you have already read as you mull over and re-examine the play you are going to be talking about. Your task now is to decide upon your main points, how you are going to present, how you are going to support them, how your presentation is going to be shaped. This is point at which you consolidate your notes, bring them into relation to one another, and begin to develop your own interpretation of the texts you choose.

(3) Remember the text: Your presentation is about the poems we are studying that week. All additional reading and material is therefore to be aimed at interpreting this text, which lies at the centre of your endeavours. Don't forget this. If you can't integrate the readings I have suggested into your presentation, we can live with that. While a brief summary of the additional readings is useful, that is most productive in the service of what you want to say about the poems you select. Indeed, the readings assigned are to be used in the way most productive for you. If they turn out to be directly relevant, then a discussion of their arguments is warranted; if not, they may simply provide you with quotes or snippets that support your point, or trigger your way of thinking about the play. Your talk should be a coherent and concise exposition of the poems chosen in relation to the contextual material provided by secondary and primary sources.

(4) Make a handout: There are different ways of doing this, depending on your style. One would be to have a handout indicating important quotations – from the poems chosen, the secondary, and the primary sources -- around which your presentation is constructed. But, in this case, you should actually include the quotations on the sheet you hand out, and not just the indications of where they are to be found. This will save you time (so you don't fumble around among your papers looking for quotes); this will help the listeners, who can follow the quote on the page and think about it (rather than fumbling among their papers to find the quotes). Another option would be to have a handout that simply lays out the main points you want to hit on in the course of your presentation, that is, the structure and layout of the talk. This should not simply be a laundry list, but one in which the logic of the talk becomes apparent. The ideal option is, of course, to combine these two modes: to have a handout that lays out the main points, and for each main point, offers the textual evidence (the quotes) used to back up and make that point. This has the added advantage of giving your listeners a full and concise record of what was communicated in class that day.

(5) Raise questions: The report is not a final, finished essay -- even if it tries to work towards that. You need an argument. Your argument has to be suggestive and developed. But your analysis does not have to be complete. So it is both useful and legitimate to have things in your talk that are speculative and aimed at encouraging discussion on the topic and the poems at hand. Raising interesting questions during and the end of the presentation will include listeners and allow a dialogue to emerge. Your questions will provide a valuable resource for me as I take up your presentation where you end it.

(6) Length: no more than 20 minutes.