Presenting Your Research

I. The Research Proposal Presentation
The overall purpose of a research proposal presentation is inquiry: you’re sharing what you’ve learned so far and how you hope to develop it so that you might hear from others what questions they have, where they felt confused, and new directions they think you might pursue.

WHAT TO SAY
- Remember that the proposal presentation is about your work in progress. You don’t have to have firm conclusions yet. Offer some possible ends you see reaching, and find out from your audience whether they think those are achievable.
- Don’t worry at this point about having every statistic lined up to support yourself or every quotation at hand. However, do be able to speak confidently about what the major scholars you’ve read have argued.
- Discuss your methodology, both what you have already done and what else you hope to do. A classmate may have run into a source that would work well for you and can bring this up during this time.

HOW TO SAY IT
- Although you are on the spot for a somewhat formal presentation, think of the proposal presentation as a conversation. Be open to interruptions or questions as you go, and stop and ask questions yourself if some occur to you.

VISUAL AIDS
You might not use many visual aids during a proposal feedback session; a full PowerPoint show, for example, might not be feasible if you haven’t yet collected all the information you’d want to share in this visual medium. A handout, however, might be helpful. Consider a handout of the working outline of your final paper; don’t read the outline at your audience but call their attention to each section as it comes up in your presentation. And since it’s a working outline, you can solicit advice from your listeners on how you might improve the organization or the development of ideas.

Active Listening and Peer Feedback
- Remember that the feedback you provide here will have a direct impact on the way your classmate shapes his or her final research project.
- Take notes (on an outline, if provided) with questions you have or terms you want better explained. Also note any parts of the proposal that sounded particularly interesting or fruitful. However, don’t let note-taking keep you from giving attention and eye contact to the speaker.
- Try to make a sketch of the speaker’s organizational scheme—even if the speaker has provided you with an outline, you may find as a listener that the speaker skips around or needs to bring related points closer together.
- When it comes time to offer feedback, make comments that are constructive and specific rather than general. For example, instead of saying, “I was confused by your organization,” say, “The section on the economic implications of the Beijing Olympics needs to go earlier.”
- Ask the presenter what visual aids they might plan to use in the final presentation. Make specific suggestions about what the audience might find helpful: “I’d like to see images of Beijing clean-up” or “You’ll probably want to offer a graph that shows how the population changed over time.”
II. The Final Research Presentation

Once you have completed your research project, you’ll want to share your findings and conclusions with others, helping each other add to the knowledge base you will all draw on as you continue your conversation with others in the field.

WHAT TO SAY

- Begin by making a sentence outline of your entire paper—this entails summarizing each paragraph in a single sentence and organizing those sentences into smaller paragraphs of related points.
- Then, keeping in mind the time allotted for your presentation, cut out any of these sentences that are interesting but not vital for an audience’s understanding.
- Using your pared-down sentence outline, find one or two specific pieces of evidence from your research to support each; then work on smooth transitions between all the sections. Depending on the context of your presentation, you might add introductory remarks about your methodology.

HOW TO SAY IT

- Although one or two well-placed quotations can help add some power and authority to your presentation, don’t overwhelm your audience by reading many long quotations from other sources, no matter how interesting or well-written they may be—listeners might get confused about where the quote begins or ends, or whether it’s a quotation at all.
- Similarly, decide which statistics, facts, figures, or dates are essential for you to discuss aloud. If you must show a progression over time or make a comparison of statistics, use a visual aid of some sort to display the information rather than trying to make listeners strain to keep it all straight.
- Prepare ahead of time for questions: rehearse your presentation in front of a friend or WORD Studio tutor and ask them to lob the questions they might imagine your listeners having.
- If possible and permissible within the context of your presentation, add an interactive element, something that asks the audience to respond to you or to each other. This can be as simple as taking a show of hands on a few questions to see how much your audience knows, or asking them to describe to you what they see on a visual aid (for example, telling you what a graph seems to be showing).

VISUAL AIDS:

- Handouts can be useful for showing data that you want everyone to look at several times (rather than having them squint at a PowerPoint slide); handouts can also be a place to gather some of the important quotations that you don’t read aloud during your presentation. Avoid the temptation to simply read a handout straight through to your audience; even consider not giving the handout out until near the end of the presentation.

- PowerPoint might be preferable to handouts if you have many different data sets you need to go through, or if you want to display visual images (photographs, maps, etc.) to complement your discussion. Using PowerPoint well is an art; consult with good online guides or a WORD Studio tutor for more advice.

Active Listening and Peer Feedback

- Since you’ve heard your classmates’ proposals, you already have an idea of what the presentation will cover. Before a classmate begins speaking, therefore, identify at least one question you have and listen to see how (or if) they answer it.
- Use handouts actively: take notes, underline key points, jot down questions in the margin.
- If the speaker gives a PowerPoint presentation, consider it a visual outline of the overall presentation. Don’t attempt to write down everything on a slide; instead, write down one key point from each to remind yourself of questions and observations later.
- If this is a final research product, offering structural feedback might not be that helpful. Instead, aim for questions about content that might engender further thought in the speaker and the rest of the audience—even if the speaker never revises this particular research project further, he or she will have been exposed to new venues of exploration through your questions.