

15.281 Assignment
Presentation to a Hostile Audience
(with self-evaluation and optional revision)

The Presentation

Prepare a presentation (with visual aids if appropriate) on a topic of your choice, addressed to a hostile audience. You will have 10 minutes total, but to allow interaction, you should prepare no more than 5 minutes worth of material (and you may find that you have trouble getting even that amount presented before interruption, depending on the topic and situation). Your presentation may be explicitly (e.g., recommend a project that your audience actively opposes) or implicitly (e.g., explain new belt-tightening measures to your staff in a way that elicits their support without alienating them) persuasive, or it may deliver bad news (e.g., tell staff of a plant close-down). Here are some additional sample topics to give you ideas:

- You are CEO for a firm that has been suffering losses over the past two years. You have just come from a Board of Directors session in which it was decided that the firm must close one of its plants and lay off 1,000 people. Announce this decision either to your management staff or to the personnel of the doomed plant.
- You are an outside consultant brought in to evaluate the upcoming launch of a new computer service for home computer users. Firm X has spent a great deal of time developing this product, and those directly involved in the product are very enthusiastic about it. You have decided on the basis of your study, however, that the market is not yet ready for such a service. You must address a group composed of Firm X executives (including several champions of this project), recommending against launching the product at this time.

Remember that audience interaction takes time, so you should limit the length of the presentation itself. (You might, however, have additional overhead transparencies prepared for responding to likely questions.)

Note: Please prepare a paragraph or two for me and for the other students in your presentation group, explaining your scenario and suggesting likely lines of questioning.

Guidelines

Form: 10-minute interactive presentation
Due: Mar. 1
Grade: 75% of course grade, based on persuasive strategy and structure, delivery, handling of hostile questions, and visual aids (if used)

The Self-Evaluation

View the videotape of your presentation twice, then write a 1-2 page memo to the person who viewed your presentation (i.e., to me or to the TA), analyzing your performance in the areas listed below, and suggesting changes that might improve it. Feel free to focus on those issues that seem most relevant to your presentation.

Strategy and structure: Were you explicitly or implicitly persuasive? Did you use direct or indirect structure? Why? How did you organize your main points, and why? How effective were your strategy and structure? What would you do differently next time, based on the audience's reaction and your viewing of the videotape?

Handling of hostile questions: Analyze how well you answered questions and dealt with hostility. Did you anticipate most of the questions in advance, or did some take you by surprise? Did you stay calm? Were your answers credible and effective? Did you avoid getting into one-on-one debates with a single questioner? What would you do differently next time, based on the audience's reaction and your viewing of the videotape?

Delivery: Did you feel confident when you gave your presentation? Do you look confident in the videotape? Assess your strengths and weaknesses in verbal and nonverbal aspects of delivery (e.g., voice tone, gestures, eye contact, etc.) How does your delivery compare to that in your presentations in 15.280, if you took that class? What would you do differently next time, based on the audience's reaction and your viewing of the videotape?

Visual Aids: Did you use visual aids? If you did, evaluate them. Were they appropriate and effectively designed? How would you change them (if at all) in the future? If you didn't use visual aids, why not? If you revise your presentation, should you use them?

Guidelines

Form: 1-2 page memo, single spaced
Due: March 8 or one week following delivery of presentation
Grade: 7.5% of course grade, based on acuteness of analysis, adequacy of evidence, organization, clarity, and effectiveness

Optional Revised Presentation

You may choose to give your presentation to a hostile audience again, correcting as many problems in the original as possible. This revision is a chance to benefit from the in-class feedback and your self-analysis. You should keep the same general situation and purpose unless we agree that you need to change. Your new grade on the presentation will be averaged with your original one. These presentations will take place out of class as scheduled during the week of Mar. 29.