A Guide to Preparing a Speech

Inquire: Preparing to Prepare

Overview

Presenting can be a daunting task, but the better you prepare, the better you will present. Outlines might only seem helpful in a classroom setting, but outlining a presentation has a lot of benefit. This lesson will teach you how to select a topic, the components of an outline, how to make a works cited page, and how to identify qualified sources. You will then learn about in-text and verbal citations.

Big Question: What is the most important part of preparing for a presentation?

Watch: Preparation in Action

When given a presentation, there are a few steps to take to make it easier on you. Let's watch Sam prepare for a presentation she was just given.

Sam knows she has to give a presentation at work showing off the work her team has done in the past fiscal quarter. She wants to choose something interesting to her, researchable, and able to be made relevant to the board. She decides to show off the sales numbers the team has managed to put up for the past quarter. She is very interested in tracking market data, so she knows it will be fun to talk about those things. Since she is interested in market data collection, she knows she will be able to research how her team has done since that's what she is in charge of normally. Finally, since the board wants to know how much money her team is making, she knows they will be interested in their sales data as well.

Now that Sam has a topic selected, it’s time for her to start preparing an outline. She decides that she wants to show the board that last quarter was her team’s strongest quarter yet. With that as her thesis, she sets out to find three pieces of supporting evidence: total sales, new clients, and retention of old clients. Now that she has her thesis and three main points, she sets out researching the data she needs. As she finds the information, she needs she makes sure to cite where she got her data from, in case anyone on the board wants to double check her numbers. She works on compiling all the data into a full sentence outline so she can get a feel for what her presentation includes so far.

Once she is happy with the information in the outline, she decides it is time to turn her full sentence outline into a presentation outline. She trims everything down to only include the most important information, and she starts to practice her presentation using the shorter version of the outline she made. Knowing she has prepared as best she can, Sam is confident that the presentation is going to be a smashing success!
Read: Preparing a Presentation Start to Finish

Overview
When giving a presentation, it can be daunting to get ready to be on your feet presenting. This lesson will walk you through the process of preparing a presentation from start to finish.

Selecting a Topic
Start by picking a topic. You want your topic to be interesting, researchable, and relatable. When choosing a topic, choose something that you care about and something that you can make others care about. In a professional setting, this might look like something you like about your company that could be improved. Maybe you have a passion for data analysis and want to show your committee how well the group is doing. Whatever it is, if you enjoy it, it becomes easier to make others enjoy it too.

Make sure the topic you choose is researchable. You need to have access to the data supporting your thesis. If that means having access to public records, internal company data, or academic studies, you want to make sure you can find information to support your claims.

Finally, your topic should be relatable. You never want to present about something that doesn’t connect to your audience. If your audience cares about the subject, it is easier to feel good about the presentation. Finding a topic that you know can relate to your audience is key to a good presentation.

Outline Components
Once you have a topic, it’s time to start outlining a presentation. Outlines aren’t just for classroom use; they can help you collect your thoughts into an organized fashion for any purpose. There are two kinds of outlines to prepare when developing a presentation. The first is a preparation outline. This has complete sentences to explain your thoughts and explain the data you are using to support your claims. This outline is longer and will be written more formally. It is more formatted than an essay or a manuscript, but contains many of the same parts. Once you have created the preparation outline, you should make that into a presentation outline. When presenting you don’t want to read large amounts of information to your audience so converting the full-sentence preparation outline to a presentation outline makes giving the presentation easier. The difference between the two outlines is that a preparation outline is more detailed while the presentation outline is essentially shorthand notes to keep you on track. They have all of the same components.

An outline should include an introduction that introduces your topic, your thesis, and the main points that will be presented. It should then have a body section that provides main points to prove your thesis true. You should finish with a conclusion that restates your thesis, summarizes your main points, and wraps up everything you want your audience to know.

Writing outlines helps you become familiar with your material so your presentation can go as smoothly as possible. Don’t avoid putting together an outline as it can save you time and prevent stress when presenting.
Works Cited

When you give a presentation, you often won’t make things up. You will need to have research that proves the points you are making. When you use research, cite it so the audience members know where your information came from. When making an outline, those citations should be included in a works cited. A works cited, or reference page, is an organized list that tells the sources used in a written presentation. Works cited are used to let your audience know the source of your research, as well as allow for other people to fact check the information you provide in your speech.

There are several places online that can help you create a works cited page easily. Microsoft Word also offers tools to easily create a works cited page. When making a works cited page, check against whatever publication style guide you have been instructed to use to see how to format the citation information. Often, people overlook the works cited when putting together presentations, but it is a very important component to avoid plagiarism.

Qualified Sources

When making a presentation, you need to have research to support your arguments. The places you find that information are known as sources. A source is where you found specific information presented in a presentation. A qualified source is a source that minimizes conflicts of interest while maximizing factual information and providing sufficient context for the information provided. These sources are what should be included in your works cited page.

When finding out if a source is qualified, there is a series of questions to ask. How old is the information? Current information is almost always more useful than outdated data. Who created the information? Knowing the source’s biases helps you understand if the information is factual or if it is serving an agenda. Who paid for the information? Oftentimes, sources will disclose their funding sources in order to help make known any conflicts of interest they may have. If you are able to answer these questions and they do not raise any red flags, you will be in a good place to use the information you have found.

Just because information presents a bias doesn’t mean it can’t be used. So long as you present the information, acknowledge its bias, and explain how other sources back up the same information, you can still use sources that aren’t as qualified as others. Generally speaking, if three places are reporting the same thing, you can trust the information being presented.

Reflect Poll: Source Quality and Presentation Quality

Do you think the quality of information is important to the quality of a presentation?

- Yes
- No

Expand: Citations: In-Text and Verbal

Overview

When presenting, include citations for your information. There are two kinds of citations to be aware of: in-text and verbal. This section will cover the difference between the two types, when to use each kind, and what to include.
In-Text Citations

An in-text citation is a brief reference to the original author of the information being used. There are several professional writing styles that each have their own stylistic versions of in-text citations and how they should look. Reference the appropriate style guide, provided by either your professor or employer, to determine what they should look like. Regardless of writing style, there are several times when an in-text citation is needed. The general rule of thumb is any time you are using information that did not come from you, you should use an in-text citation. You could say, “According to Dr. Jackson...” or include a parenthetical citation after a direct quote. Always use an in-text citation when presenting information that comes from someone else.

When writing an in-text citation, include the author’s name, and typically, parenthetically offer the date of the source. This means you would say, “According to Dr. Jackson, ‘insert the full quote here (and include the date the source was published here).’” Some styles would also want you to include a page number for the direct quote.

Verbal Citations

A verbal citation is when you verbally tell your audience where your information came from. Similar to in-text citations, verbal citations should be used any time you reference information that you did not come up with yourself. When presenting data or evidence of any kind, you should tell your audience where you found that information. Unlike in-text citations, verbal citations should always include the same things no matter what you are presenting about. When providing a verbal citation, you should always include the name of the author. After telling us who they are, you should tell us why they are a qualified source to talk about your topic. This might mean telling us their current job, or any relevant degrees they might have. After their qualifications, you should tell us where the information was published and the date it was published. These allow your audience to go back and find the information themselves if they want to.

Lesson Toolbox

Additional Resources and Readings

- A chart to help you evaluate the quality of many common news sources

A website offering great tools to learn how to properly cite information according to many different writing styles, in particular MLA and APA
- Link to resource: https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/purdue_owl.html

A website helping you generate citations quickly, but make sure to double check them
- Link to resource: http://www.citationmachine.net/apa/cite-a-book

Lesson Glossary

works cited: an organized list telling the sources used in a written presentation, also known as a reference page
source: where you found specific information presented in a presentation
qualified source: a source that minimizes conflicts of interest while maximizing factual information and providing sufficient context for the information provided
in-text citation: a brief reference to the original author of the information being used
verbal citation: verbally telling your audience where the information you are referencing comes from

Check Your Knowledge

1. You should only use information from qualified sources.
   a. True
   b. False
2. Information present in three or more places can be trusted.
   a. True
   b. False
3. A preparation outline presents information in full sentences.
   a. True
   b. False

Answer Key:

Citations

Lesson Content:

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