***ST. OLAF SPEAKING SPACE***

Suggestions for Improving Oral Presentations (if an item is checked, consider some of the suggestions for improvement):

**TIME:**

\_\_\_\_\_**Your speech is short or too long for the time limit of the assignment**. Remember: you want to speak thoughtfully and clearly (and expressively!) and you cannot do that if you are rushing to fit in a lot of material. Better to cut out material and speak well than fit in material and confuse your audience.

**ORGANIZATION and THOUGHT:**

\_\_\_\_\_\_**Clearly define your purpose for the speech/presentation** (are you persuading your audience? Are you giving them information? What is your purpose?).

\_\_\_\_\_\_**Articulate your thesis or argument for the speech**. Your audience needs a CLEAR FOCUS in order to process the information that you are communicating. SIMILAR to an essay, have a thesis. *Consider a brief pause after giving your thesis to allow audience to identify and think about the thesis*.

\_\_\_\_\_**Know your material**. The more secure you are in your knowledge, the better you will speak. If you have any doubt as to WHAT you are saying, it will show. Do you have evidence for your assertions? **Is the evidence from reliable sources?** Do you reference those sources in the speech (to add legitimacy to your evidence)? If questioned, can you clearly and convincingly support statements from your speech?

\_\_\_\_\_\_**Organize your speech logically**, so the audience can easily follow what you are saying. If you are in a group, each person’s speech should lead logically, and irrevocably, to the next person’s speech to create one WHOLE presentation. As with an essay, make sure that your TRANSITIONS from one thought to the next are logical. **Your speech should have a FLOW** to it, leading the audience easily from one idea to the next. Remember the primacy/recency principle: Place your most important or significant points at the beginning and ending of your speech.

\_\_\_\_\_**Give yourself a STRONG introduction and CONCLUSION**. You should begin and end your presentation with a memorable idea. Effective attention-getters and catchy endings will leave the audience with a favorable impression of your presentation. Humor, vital information, novel information, conflict, ideas with which the audience is familiar, activity or movement, suspense, startling statistics, and quotes or stories are all ways to gain attention. Make sure your audience knows that you are finished. Give your speech a “button” – an explicit ending that is provocative.

\_\_\_\_\_**OTHER:**

**POWERPOINT SLIDES OR VISUAL MATERIAL**

\_\_\_\_\_\_**Relate the slide of visual material to your presentation**. You may need to identify people in or context of pictures or videos for your audience. Clearly show how that visual element ILLUSTRATES a particular idea in the speech.

\_\_\_\_\_\_**Lessen text on slide**. Aim for, at most, six lines of text, six words per line. BEWARE long quotes (your audience will read the quote and not listen to you). BEWARE too much text (your audience will get lost in the text and fail to connect it to your speech). **Make the image dominate the slide.**

\_\_\_\_\_\_**OTHER:**

**PHYSICAL AND VOCAL PRESENTATION:**

\_\_\_\_\_**Look at your audience** (not at your notes, not just at your professor). Be sure to have an OUTLINE to follow while speaking. AVOID writing out your entire speech (you will be too tempted to simply look at what you have written). MEMORIZE the trajectory of your speech (know what your main points are and how each point connects to, emerges from the previous point). Notecards are great because you cannot write a lot on them, ideally, you should only write PROMPTS for your memory.

\_\_\_\_\_**Move only to express the meaning of your speech**. Start your work on the speech by grounding yourself solidly in one place. Wandering is a problem for many speakers and can be solved by developing an awareness of your movement. Stand in front of a mirror and do your speech…are you moving for NO reason? Stop, and ground yourself. Only move as a way to help the audience understand what you are saying.

\_\_\_\_\_**Make language appropriate to your audience**. For a college presentation you should use language more formal than that you use with your friends. Do integrate the vocabulary of your class into your speech. BUT make sure that you do not use overly technical language if you have a general audience.

\_\_\_\_\_**Eliminate filler words**. “Um”s and “likes”s enter your speech when you are unsure of what your next thought is. If you use these words it is a sign that you need to memorize more of your speech and YOU need a clearer understanding of the path of your speech (these filler words often come in transitions from one point to the next…know what the next point is). Better to PAUSE, then speak, than to use a filler word.

\_\_\_\_\_**Vary vocal pitch and pace**. Locate moments in your speech where you want to accelerate (building excitement for the audience); find a moment when you want to make an important point and take a pause, slow down and bracket out that moment for the audience to pay attention. Notice how you vary your vocal pitch and pace in real life, when talking with friends, bring that same naturalness to your speech. Have friends tell you if you are speaking in a monotone…the audience will fall asleep if you don’t bring variety to your speaking. Vary your pitch, volume, rate and tone for emphasis.

\_\_\_\_\_\_**Articulate words and speak loudly** enough for audience to hear you at all times. If you have problems with articulation: practice OVER articulating your speech, try “chewing” the words, hit your consonants.

\_\_\_\_\_**Find natural gestures to emphasize important points**. The gesture may feel awkward at first, just practice it and see how you can find EASE with the gesture.

\_\_\_\_\_\_**OTHER**:

**TIPS FOR NERVES!**

* Be prepared – PRACTICE YOUR SPEECH A LOT! Ideally, practice in front of people unfamiliar with your topic – if they are interested and understand you, others will too!
* Before you speak take a few deep breaths, relax and mentally tell yourself that you are about to seize an opportunity to accomplish the goal you established when you first started preparing for the presentation.
* Focus on your content. Don’t focus on how nervous you feel -- that will make you more nervous. Instead, focus on what you want to say and how you are saying it.
* For more tips visit the Speaking Space webpage (<http://wp.stolaf.edu/speakingcenter/>) or just type in “Speaking Space” in the search bar.