

## Tips on Mentoring Students for Presenting Work in Professional or Research Settings 11 February 2020

### Shane Tilton (Arts and Sciences)

- 1. Explain expectations early on in the process:** A number of my students tend to get nervous early on with presenting their work. For research, I try to lead my students to the ONU Student Research Colloquium and the Ohio Communication Association conference as those conferences give students the best feedback and most support to their research. For the more creative works, I tend to promote some of the small contests like the Ohio News Media Association to have the best chance of winning some award for their efforts.
- 2. Provide multiple opportunities to get feedback:** I observe the student give a presentation once I learn that my students got accepted for a conference. I first have the student do the last third of the presentation first. We go over it a couple of times. The rationale is that if the student is comfortable with the last four to six minutes of their presentation that they will have a “place to land” at the end of their talk. It is also the part of a presentation that most people spend the least amount of time preparing. I stop them from time to time to address questions or concerns. The next part is the first third of the speech. We go over it at least two times to get a sense of the flow of the speech. Finally, two times straight through. We talk about the positives, negatives, and their comfort levels.
- 3. Short, clear, and concise:** Having the students remember the three most important takeaways of their research, being able to state those takeaways as simple sentences, and knowing how to work those takeaways into potential Q&As and discussions away for the presentation are all vital.

### Jennifer Moore (Arts and Sciences)

- 1. Emphasize flexibility and adaptability.** As public dissemination of work is often collaborative, we’re relying on other folks to help the airplane fly. We’re also counting on external factors—weather, technology—to work the way they’re supposed to work. Running potential scenarios by my students: “What will you/we plan to do if the technology is down?” “What will you/we do if the person presenting before you goes over time?” “How might you respond if an audience member asks you a question you don’t understand or can’t answer?” can both help them have a backup plan, as well as potentially prevent a not-so-pleasant presentation.
- 2. Model best practices/professionalism.** I try to be cognizant of how what I say and what I do lines up. If I emphasize that students should keep to their time limit, I should keep to my time limit. If I recommend that they show up early, I should show up early. If I

encourage them to speak loudly and clearly, I should do the same. I also find it helpful to be explicit with these expectations in advance of a presentation (say, a week to a few days early): sharing with students what concrete expectations I have can help, especially if they're not seeing those best practices modeled elsewhere.

### **Amelia Anderson-Wile (Arts and Sciences)**

1. **Give students lots of “low stakes” opportunities** to present their research. One nice way to do this is by holding weekly group meetings where the students are expected to present their work a couple of times a semester. If possible, it is great to pair up with another faculty member to give students more diverse feedback on their work.
2. **Have students submit their posters or research talks to you well before the actual event.** This allows students time to incorporate meaningful feedback from you. Talk with the students about the details of their work they may have trouble recalling on the spot and encourage them to build those items into their presentations. It is easy for students to get flustered by questions.
3. **Encourage students to take advantage of local opportunities** to present their work. Events like the ONU Research Colloquium are great ways to prepare for regional or national conferences.

### **David Sawyers (Engineering)**

1. **Emphasize that presentation skills can be learned and improved with practice.** Many students think of themselves as poor presenters, and have decided that there is nothing they can do about it.
2. **Use recordings** to help students improve their presentation skills. I find it much easier to provide meaningful feedback if I can view a recording than if I only watch a presentation live. Technology has made it easy for students to record and share their presentations, and the ability to pause and rewind means that I have time to think about what I am seeing and to provide suggestions without interrupting the flow of the presentation.
3. **Help students understand what it really means, in practical terms, to think about their audience.** The single greatest shortcoming I see in most student presentations is a lack of understanding of the audience's perspective. Students tend to dive into details without providing sufficient context, or to focus on obscure issues that required a lot of effort to resolve without adding much value, or to assume a common background that doesn't exist.