

## The Presentation

Working with your partner, prepare a 15–20 minute presentation about some aspect of the reading for the day of your presentation. If you are presenting on poetry, you should plan to speak about one (or at most two) poems. If you are presenting on fiction, you will be able to discuss only a small part of your text. (Later in the term there may be presentations involving one of the assigned readings in scholarly essays; I will work with presenters on modifying this assignment in that case.)

The goal of the presentation is to **propose problems for interpretation**. Proposing a problem is not as simple as asking any question: a problem only emerges when it has been framed in terms of **specific evidence** which has been **carefully analyzed**. Thus, though the presentation does not have to be a formal argument, it should have a clear structure. A typical way to proceed would be to begin with a fairly straightforward or obvious issue and progressively complicate it with the details of the text at hand. An alternative would be to isolate and bring into a view a pattern of details which other readers might not have noticed.

Plan to organize your presentation around the discussion of a few chosen passages: your commonplace book (both your own entries and others') can be a useful resource here. Though you can mention other passages or moments in the text—or, even better, quote further—the ideal is to devote **intensive attention** to all the details of the two or three passages that matter most to the problem you are proposing: examine the passages' rhetorical aims, their grammatical patterns, their levels of diction, their use of figures like metaphor and simile, their thematic connections or disconnections to other parts of the text in question. In the case of poetry, it is particularly important to attend to linguistic and formal patterns including meter and rhyme. Be miniaturists: aim to make a lot of interpretive headway out of small-scale details, rather than offering broad generalizations.

Each member of the partnership should speak for about the same amount of time. My expectation is that the presentation will be joint work. That does not mean you have to agree with your partner! One effective presentational tactic is to begin a debate between you. Another is of course a collaborative presentation of an argument or question you share with one another.

At the end of the presentation, attempt to pose a question for discussion. A good discussion question usually asks a “why?” or “how?” question about a specific aspect of a text. Try to find a genuinely open question, not one with an obvious answer. Or look for a debate that genuinely has two sides that you wish the class to engage.

## Practice Your Presentation

At least once. Out loud. With a timer.

## Visual aids

You are welcome simply to invite the class to refer to their copies of the texts you are discussing. Additional aids are optional. If you prepare a handout by 10 a.m. on the morning of your presentation day and e-mail it to me as a **PDF file**, I will be able to print it out and photocopy it for the class. If you wish to project slides from a computer, we will be able to make use of the classroom workstations, but please discuss this with me **at least two days in advance**.

## Grading standard

Each partner will be graded individually, but both will be fully credited for joint work. The main areas I will be evaluating are:

Topic: clarity, interest, **specificity**

Questions posed: genuine openness, sophistication

Textual evidence: carefulness of choice; density and specificity of analysis

Speaking: preparation, clear structure, effective use of the time interval