Murray State University MFA Program

Thesis Residency Teaching Presentation

Purpose

Because of the distance-learning approach of low-residency MFA programs, students receive more individualized time with their faculty mentors but fewer opportunities for practicing their teaching skills in a classroom of their own. One of our program goals is to create for our MFA students more pedagogical opportunities, starting with the thesis residency teaching presentation.

The purpose of the teaching presentation, which is given during your final residency in the days after your thesis defense, is twofold. First, it serves as an exhibition of your readiness for graduation and the culmination of your career as a graduate student in the MFA program. Second, the teaching presentation offers you the chance to practice your presentation and teaching skills in front of a smart, supportive "class" of your peers and mentors who can provide you with insightful and invaluable feedback.

Ideally, your presentation will grow out of one or more of the annotations you have written during your previous tutorials. It may work in tandem with the critical portion of the introduction to your thesis, which should also grow out of your annotations. In either case, you want your presentation to focus on what you believe is a fascinating, crucial, and/or overlooked element of craft in your particular genre, and you can use one source text (a story, novel, poem, essay, etc.) or several to illustrate your points. You should imagine your class to be comprised of students who are knowledgeable about literature or creative writing, but not experts – an intermediate or advanced undergraduate English or creative writing major, for instance. Your presentation should last 45-50 minutes; an additional 10-15 minutes will be scheduled for q&a with the audience.

Process

During your thesis tutorial, you will work one-on-one with a faculty mentor to prepare for your teaching presentation. You will complete a number of preparatory documents in consultation with the faculty mentor. These documents include

- Proposal
  - The proposal is a brief 300-500 word document in which you describe your presentation topic and source text(s) and provide a rationale for them.
  - *Note: your proposal must also be approved by the MFA program director.*
- Statement of pedagogical practices
  - This 3-5 page statement is a more thorough explanation of your plans for your topic and the text(s) you'll be using. Some questions you might address in this statement: what approach do you plan to take for your presentation? Will it be a lecture with minimal student participation, or will it be more discussion-oriented with special attention given to student interaction? How will you introduce the material? What will be the major points of your presentation, and how will you proceed through them? What elements/excerpts will you highlight, and why? How will you use these highlighted elements to illustrate good writing practices? How will you involve the students?
- Materials for use during the presentation
  - These materials include any handouts you might distribute to the class, as well as media clips or powerpoint presentations that you might use. (Tips for successful powerpoint

presentations are included in this packet) While we certainly don't want your class to be overwhelmed with handouts or media clips, a couple of well-designed materials incorporated effectively into a presentation not only will make the students' experience more enjoyable, but also will provide additional support for the lessons of your presentation.

- Outline of presentation
    - This is the document you will use to guide you through your presentation. It can be a bulleted outline, notes, a script, or any combination of those.
- Two follow-up assignments for students
    - If this were an actual classroom, you would evaluate your students' understanding of the material by giving them an assignment. What kind of assignments would you give? For this element of the presentation, you will design two assignments, one of which must be a prompt for an essay or short critical response. The other is your choice. You might design a prompt for a story or poem that incorporates the elements you've discussed, or you could design a quiz that students would take at the beginning of the next class to evaluate what they remember.

For scheduling purposes, we encourage you to follow the model of the tutorial learning contract for the timely submission of these documents to your mentor. Final copies of all materials should be emailed to the program director no later than two weeks before the first day of the residency; this will allow time for any last, minor revisions to be made, and for the program assistant to Xerox copies of the necessary materials.

After you've given your presentation, your audience will fill out an evaluation form, which will be collected and submitted to the program director. Within 24 hours of the presentation, copies of these evaluations will be made available to you and your faculty mentor. You will also schedule and attend an exit conference with your mentor and the program director and/or associate director to debrief and discuss your performance and the evaluations.

Powerpoint Tips for Preparing a Professional Presentation

- *Taken and adapted from an article published by Tina Sieber on May 23, 2009. The full article can be found at http://www.makeuseof.com/tag/10-tips-for-preparing-a-professional-presentation/*

Presentations – whether they are made with PowerPoint or other applications, are a great way to support a speech, visualize complicated concepts or focus attention on a subject. However, a bad presentation can achieve the opposite. Badly designed slides with too much text or bad graphics can distract or worse, irritate the audience. Here's is a short guide that will help you create presentations with a professional look and concise content, avoiding the most common mistakes.

DESIGN

The first thing that gives a professional touch to any presentation is the design. Keep the following tips in mind:

1. Compose Slides

- Don't copy & paste slides from different sources.
- Keep the design very basic and simple. It shall not distract.
- Pick an easy to read font face.
- Carefully select font sizes for headers and text.
- Leave room for highlights, such as images or take home messages.
- Decorate scarcely but well.
- Restrict the room your design takes up and don't ever let the design restrict your message.

2. Be consistent

- Consistently use the same font face and sizes on all slides.
- Match colors.

You may use your company logo, highlight headers, create a special frame for figures/images or the whole slide, but don't overload your slides with these elements.

COLORS

A poor choice of colors can ruin a presentation.

1. Use Contrast

- Black text on a white background will always be the best but also the most boring choice.
- If you want to play with colors, keep it easy on the eyes and always keep good contrast in mind so that your readers do not have to strain to guess what you've typed on your slide.

2. Apply Brilliance

- Carefully use color to highlight your message!
- Don't weaken the color effect by using too many colors at an instance.
- Make a brilliant choice: match colors for design and good contrast to highlight your message.

TEXT

Remember that your slides are only there to support, not to replace your talk! You'll want to tell a story, describe your data or explain circumstances, and only provide keywords through your slides. If you read your slides and if you do it slow and badly, the audience will get bored and stop listening.

1. KISS (*K*eep *I*t *S*traight and *S*imple)

- Keywords only.
- No sentences!
- Never read your slides, talk freely.

ANIMATION & MEDIA

In animations, there is a fine line between a comic or professional impression. However, animations can be rather powerful tools to visualize and explain complicated matters. A good animation can not only improve understanding, but can also make the message stick with your audience.

1. Don't Be Silly

- Use animations and media sparingly.
- Use animations to draw attention to specific major points.
- Use animations to clarify a model or emphasize an effect.

TARGET & CONTENT

Your target i.e. your audience, defines the content of your presentation. For example, you won't be able to teach school kids about the complicated matters of economy. However, you may be able to explain what economy is in the first place and why it is important.

1. Keep Your Audience in Mind

- What do they know?
- What do you need to tell them?
- What do they expect?
- What will be interesting to them?
- What can you teach them?
- What will keep them focused?
- Answer these questions and boil your slides down to the very essentials.
- In your talk, describe the essentials colorfully and choose your weapons i.e. text, images and animations wisely (see above).

2. Practice

If you lose the attention of your audience, everything will be lost — it won't matter how ingenious your design or how brilliantly you picked colors and keywords. A well-prepared and enthusiastic talk will help you convince your audience and maintain their attention. There are some key points that define a good talk.

- Know your slides inside out.
- Speak freely.
- Speak with confidence – loud and clear.
- Don't speak too fast.
- Maintain eye contact with the audience.