I. Basic Principles of Oral Presentation

A. Three key factors shape your presentation:

1. *You, Your Audience, the Situation*
   
a. *You:* Your goals, skills, responsibilities, interests, ethics, etc.

b. *Audience:* Their interests, knowledge, attitudes, values, etc. Your job will be easier or harder depending upon what your audience knows about your topic, how closely their views match yours, and how committed they are to their existing attitudes and beliefs. Find out as much as possible about them.

c. *Situation:* The occasion, setting, social and symbolic context, etc.

2. While designing your presentation to achieve your goals, you must adapt it to the particular audience you’re addressing and to the situation in which you will speak.

B. Speaking is fundamentally different from writing because *listening is fundamentally different from reading.*

1. A reader chooses when and where to focus attention; a speaker must focus a listener’s attention on what he or she is saying at this moment.

2. A reader controls how fast he or she will move through a text; a speaker controls how fast listeners will move through an oral presentation.

3. Readers have the option of going back and re-reading; listeners must grasp material as the speaker presents it.

4. Readers have lots of graphic cues about order and importance of points and about the relationship among ideas; listeners rely on the speaker to be their guide and interpreter.
II. Maximizing Effectiveness through Content

A. Show how your ideas relate to your listeners (significance, relevance).

B. Select supporting material that is clear and meaningful to your listeners.

1. *Translate* statistics into more meaningful terms.

2. *Restate* major points and important pieces of information.

3. *Use concrete, specific examples* to illustrate vague or general points.

4. *Bring it home* for your listeners.
   
a. Use examples your listeners can relate to.

b. Use comparisons to relate the unknown to the known.

c. When possible, refer to people, places, and events that are familiar to your listeners.

III. Maximizing Effectiveness through Design

A. Choose an organizational plan that works best for your goals and your audience.

1. *“State your case, then prove it”*: This is the approach used in research reports, briefings, instructional presentations, debates, and argumentative speeches. It involves stating your thesis and giving an overview of your main arguments or points in the introduction of your presentation, then laying out the case in detail in the body, with a summary in the conclusion. This plan aids audience comprehension, because the audience knows early on where the speech is going and what they should listen for, and it boosts retention, because listeners hear major points repeated several times.

2. *“Build your case as you go”*: This approach is most often used to advocate a thesis which the audience is likely to doubt, oppose, or resist. It typically involves withholding your thesis until you have built a foundation of audience acceptance. This is accomplished by starting with less controversial arguments or information and building gradually to your thesis. The chief advantage of this strategy is its ability to help delay the formation of counter-arguments in the minds of your listeners and to limit premature rejection of your thesis. *One caution*: Do not choose this plan just because it seems to embody less redundancy or more subtlety than the other approach. A certain amount of redundancy is needed and attempts at subtlety can produce confusion. As speechwriter Alan Perlman says, the goal is “communication, not puzzle construction.”
B. Use previews and summaries.

1. Previews tell listeners what’s coming next or how you’re going to develop a point. A good introduction usually contains a preview to prepare listeners for the content or plan of the rest of the presentation. Previews also can be useful before presenting a body of supporting material or before any fairly lengthy discussion of a point.

2. Summaries remind listeners of what’s important in what was just covered. A summary is especially useful in reframing or refocusing the discussion after a string of supporting details or after any fairly lengthy discussion of a point. A summary is standard equipment in an effective conclusion.

C. Use signposts and transitions.

1. Signposts—such as “In the first place…,” “The second issue is…,” “The key argument is…,” and the like—tell the audience where they are in the speech and highlight what’s important to note or remember.

2. Transitions help listeners see movement from one point to the next and clarify the relationship between ideas. Because of the differences between reading and listening, transitions in oral presentations often must be longer and more explicit than those used in writing. Changes in vocal and physical expression also can help listeners recognize a transition.