

## Establishing a Philosophical Baseline: What to Check Before Submitting

- Given the requirements for each response – use evidence as support, express and flesh out an opinion, conclude memorably – I’d expect a minimum of two paragraphs per response. But that’s by no means a hard/fast number. I can’t know in advance how much you’ll need to write to prove your particular point or advance your particular claim; as unscientific as it sounds, I want you to write until you know you’re finished with an answer. (That’s one of the most important skills you can develop in this class: knowing exactly how much to say, and exactly when it’s time to stop. It doesn’t come naturally.)
- Every response needs to have, at a minimum, one particularly noteworthy/”knockout” line. The best places for these are in your beginning or ending. While I’d obviously love to read multiple knockouts in every answer, I’d like to concentrate on strengthening your persuasiveness at this point in your career; as I alluded to in the first point, I’m focusing on strengthening your timing this semester.
- Do not rewrite the prompt in your response. Do not spend time, particularly in the first sentence, stating whether you agree or disagree with the original prompt. Do not state your opinion as though it is an opinion – “I think,” “I believe,” etc. State your thoughts with confidence. If you feel the need to qualify that your statement isn’t necessarily factual, you can do so by writing something along the lines of “I would assert that...”; do not use the same phraseology every time.
- You’re explaining your philosophies to an automatically-skeptical audience. Choose which type of appeal to use for each response. Some of your arguments may lend themselves to a hyper-factual or logic-based appeal. Others may rest on a foundation of anecdotes or personal experiences.
- Evidence based on non-personal examples – even those that appear in fiction, rather than those that appear in, say, the *Los Angeles Times* – typically carries more weight than anecdotal evidence. But in either case, it’s important to be wary about drawing big conclusions from too small a sample. One piece of evidence, in other words, may not be enough; if you didn’t already possess your opinion, would you have adopted it after reading your work, or would you still have plenty of doubts?
- When you’re quoting or paraphrasing sources, please cite the evidence in MLA format and include a Works Cited/Consulted page at the end of your document. (This provides practice for your “real” page at the end of your Senior Project Research Paper next semester.)
- Be wary of presuming things about what your audience believes. Don’t ask them rhetorical questions (they may respond in unanticipated or unfavorable ways), and concentrate instead on presenting your beliefs as clearly and convincingly as possible.
- Finally, remember that you’re not playing to a scoreboard. While I’ll be impressed by convincing arguments, the ultimate goal isn’t to make me believe what you believe: it’s to present your views in a way that illuminates your thought process and casts it in a rational light. **At the end of the day, whether I agree with you matters less than whether I understand your thinking – not only what you believe, but why you developed and continue to hold those beliefs.**

## Stand and Deliver: Guidelines and Tips

- You have about one minute to speak. I expect you to hit that mark as precisely as you can. Don't shoot under fifty-five seconds, as any speech that doesn't last long enough automatically fails. (If you drag out your presentation in order to hit those marks, you'll still receive the low mark.)
- If you go over time, the continuation needs to a) be justified and b) be relatively short – you have roughly thirty-three other classmates that need to present today, and we can't let everyone take those extra seconds. If you're on fire, and your answer truly merits ten extra seconds, go chase them. If you're just rambling, you'll lose points.
- You will start your clock after you say something to the effect of "Good morning/afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. I'm (First Name) (Last Name), and I'd like to speak about Letter \_\_\_." As soon as you finish that sentence, click the watch and begin your argument. Don't pause to gather your thoughts, stammer, or begin with "OK, um, like, so, there's..." – **everyone does this and it will drive you crazy once you notice it.** Just begin!
- On a related note, don't apologize in advance for your presentation – nothing like "This is going to be bad, so bear with me." You're turning an audience against you by informing them you're about to punish them with your performance, not lowering expectations or impressing others with your humility.
- Make sure that you address all sides of the classroom, and don't remain in one place. If you haven't seen each of the three cabinets within the first thirty seconds, you're probably not looking at part of the room.
- Speak with an even voice and a normal cadence. You're formal, but relaxed – an expert speaking confidently to an audience that came to hear you speak. Some enthusiasm is great; just don't over-do it!
- Remember, it's less about memorizing every word exactly, and more about memorizing your beats. *What should I be talking about first? Second? Third?* I'll be reading your script, and I won't really be bothered if you change a word here and there. Problems will crop up if you start cutting lines in the middle of the performance...or start making up bad ones as you go.
- **I cannot help you remember your lines, you will not have notes, and you cannot start over if you make a mistake. You get one chance to perform, so rise to the occasion!**
- Make sure you conclude with a conclusion. Don't just stop and head back to your seat!
- Know who's going before you. You'll need to start heading up there during their applause.
- Your wardrobe and grooming matter. Carry yourself like a competent, confident, credible adult. Ditch any clothing that's revealing or distracting. If you don't have enough formal-wear to pull this off, borrow clothes from friends or peers.
- The door to the classroom will be locked promptly at the beginning of class, and you won't be dismissed until the bell. Visit the bathroom before arriving at class, and don't be late under any circumstances.
- There are no makeup dates for these performances.
- Everyone in the room, including myself, wants you to do well and is invested in your success. (Except the person going after you. Don't look at them.) Feed off that support. Good luck!