

Presentation: From story to performance to production

Posted on: June 23, 2020
in: [Education](#), [Presentations](#)

Written by: [James Lipuma, PhD.](#), [Cristo Leon, MBA.](#) Categorized

Introduction

“**Write with the door closed**, rewrite with the **door open**. Your stuff starts out being just for you, in other words, but then it goes out. Once you know what the story is and get it right — as right as you can, anyway — it belongs to anyone who wants to read it. Or criticize it.”

Stephen King

This quote embodies a key idea that many teachers have tried to share with students. Rewriting serves as an essential part of producing effective written work. That work may take the form of an essay, report, story, or any of many other forms. Often, this storytelling process involves a production process that includes planning prior to the first writing and then moves through phases of creation, revision, editing, and proofreading to come to a finished product. Similarly, it applies to other performance and creative processes, in that the work is produced and reworked until the creator decides to share. Nonetheless, the metaphorical door still exists. For oral presentations, the metaphorical door may be in the classroom but more correctly is the moment the presenter stands in front of the class and begins speaking.

Telling a Story vs. Oral Presentations

We begin by considering the telling of a story orally. Think about when you talk to friends and relay something that happened to you. Do we still see a door? Too often we do not see the process behind the immediate experience of sharing orally. Usually, storytelling does not warrant reflection and planning for most because it appears spontaneous. Often, this storytelling experience lacks rehearsal so that the moment of production often encapsulates the entire experience. Few plans and almost none design the experience of the storytelling. Now consider an oral presentation. Most people perceive a presentation as formal, judged, and of higher stakes. Many times others assign presentations and stand in judgment over the results. Thus, when an oral presentation demands formality and contains consequences, the situation leads to planning and the metaphorical door becomes clearer. In the end, the oral presentation is creating an experience that conveys the story crafted by the presenter for the audience, whether or not the presenter realizes it.

Performance vs. Production

Many fear the pressure of standing in front of others to perform no matter the purpose or situation. Often this experience poses a myriad of challenges that may be different for every individual. Also, many argue that each presentation is different so no two performances pose the same problem. Thus, students seek to memorize content and see the performance as something to complete and move on from. Of course, some embrace the chance to perform while others prepare to minimize the possibility of failure. These differing concerns begin to move the discussion away from a simplistic view of an oral presentation as a performance towards a more sophisticated view of it as a production. By understanding the steps leading to the moment of delivery, oral presentations can be the production of an experience that is planned, designed, rehearsed, and then delivered in a way to optimize effectiveness.

Two doors for presentations

Stephen King’s two doors become much more evident when viewing an oral presentation as a production that requires planning, practice, and rehearsal before the actual moment of performance. Rehearsing in the mirror is like writing with the door closed. Performing in front of others (even just family and friends) is performing with the door open. Since the private showing is not the final product but a rehearsal, the actual finished product is not delivered until the moment of performance for the final judge. Many students see this final

performance as the time when grades are issues. After that, students see the door shut and the performance ends forever. However, if the planning led to reflection and consideration to improve work, the production goes beyond the performance and begins long before it with a clear plan to understand the limits of the performance. Three key ideas underpin any oral presentation and typically must be considered in order to increase effectiveness—***Moment***, ***Medium***, and ***Message***.

Moment, Medium, and Message

Adopting a view that centers on the “oral presenter” reflects where many students start. The first concern deals with the ***Moment*** surrounding the presentation. This reflects the particulars of what will be faced immediately before and during the oral presentation. Next, presenters move to the concerns for the ***Medium*** or how communication occurs between themselves and the audience. This reflects the particular form of the presentation and the make-up of the audience and others involved in the process. Finally, the concerns for the ***Message*** poses challenges for many presenters if they even think to consider this explicitly. This examines the material conveyed along with the end result or takeaway for a target audience. These concerns set the limits and often define the amount and type of pressure exerted on the presenter.

Key Questions for Moment, Medium and Message

Our first step involves moving presenters beyond a simple view of their presentation as a performance towards it as a production. The simple questions below ask presenters to critically reflect upon more than just concerns about content coverage. These questions highlight the circumstances of the performance and lead to steps in the planning and design process. Presenters should critically reflect and research their situation to better define what they face and what questions they may need to answer. The areas given below provide insight into parameters as an example of areas to consider for their presentation.

Moment concerns

- How long is the presentation?
- When and where will it take place?
- Who will be there and who is judging me?
- How long do I have to prepare and am I working alone?

Medium Concerns

- What form does the presentation take?
- How is the presentation to be delivered?
- What elements do you control?

Message Concerns

- What material do you need to convey?
- What do you want the audience to know as a result of your presentation?
- What do you want the audience to do as a result of your presentation?
- What do you want the audience to learn or take-away as a result of your presentation?

Conclusion

These ideas highlight a move towards more effective student oral presentations. Our first step is to allow students to view the presentation as a story whose production requires planning, design, and rehearsal prior to its performance. However, larger concerns also exist. By moving beyond a simple view of the presentation as a performance to one of it as a production leads to a more structured and involved examination of each step. This provides more scaffolding and support leading to an improved more effective final product. With these in hand, the doors lead into a room prepared for the effective performance expertly produced.

Citation

If you want to cite this blog article, please use the following:

Lipuma, J., & Leon, C. (2020, June 23). Presentation: From story to performance to production. *James Lipuma's Blog*. <https://www.jameslipuma.com/presentation-from-story-to-performance-to-production/> (<https://www.jameslipuma.com/presentation-from-story-to-performance-to-production/>).

Accessibility

If you want to download an accessible PDF copy of this blog article, use the following link:

© 2020 James Lipuma