



Presentation to a Hostile Audience

20% of course grade/Due in lab as scheduled

Prepare, rehearse, and deliver a **10-minute** persuasive presentation to a hostile audience. Visual aids are optional. You must plan to be interrupted by questions during the presentation. To allow extensive interaction, you should prepare no more than 5 minutes worth of material. Consider limiting the material you plan to cover in the presentation, but preparing additional back-up material to use in response to questions. Your presentation may be explicitly persuasive (e.g., recommend a project that your audience actively opposes) or implicitly persuasive (e.g., tell your staff about new belt-tightening measures and convince them to accept them). Although your situation should be chosen so that the audience will be openly hostile, you should do your best to defuse hostility and to persuade them of your point of view using evidence as well as emotional arguments.

You may choose your topic in conjunction with a current or past work task, project, case, or venture. You may use real data, but it must be an original presentation of the material (i.e., you may not recycle an old presentation deck). It must be aimed at a non-Sloan audience. Below are some sample topics to give you a sense of the assignment expectations:

- You are the founder of an entrepreneurial firm that grew quickly to 50 people, but that still hasn't made any revenue. Your funders are growing impatient. You have decided that you need to slow the rate at which you are burning through funds until you can show revenue and a path to profit. You have decided to make cuts in personnel and in perks. Announce this decision to your executive team or to the whole firm.
- You are an outside consultant brought in to evaluate the upcoming launch of a new service for a mobile platform. Firm X has spent a great deal of time developing this service, and those directly involved are very enthusiastic about it. You have decided on the basis of your study, however, that the market is not yet ready for such a service. You must address a group composed of Firm X executives (including several champions of this project), recommending against launching the service at this time.
- You are an executive leading a cross-functional team working on a highly visible company priority. At the midway point of this initiative, your team has failed to meet expectations, and key stakeholders are beginning to question your future direction. Now you must present a progress report to several heavily invested senior executives and restore faith in your team's ability to move forward.

At the time of your presentation, hand in a typed Presentation Planner. Before you begin the presentation itself, share your scenario and suggest likely lines of questioning.

You will be graded on the following dimensions:

1. **Strategy/Argument:** Did you construct a sound argument that was supported by credible evidence?

2. **Structure:** Was the presentation structured in such a way that it met the audience’s information needs and was easy to follow?
3. **Management of hostility:** How did you manage your own emotions to counter the hostility of your audience? Did you structure your talk effectively to manage the audience’s hostility? What other strategies (presentation of evidence, use of language, delivery) did you use to manage the expected hostility of your audience?
4. **Delivery:** Did you look and sound credible and confident? Did your delivery help diffuse the hostility raised in the presentation?
5. **Visual aids:** If you used them, how well did your visual aids contribute to your message? How well did you interact with your visual aids?

Grading Key for 15.281

Assignment fails to demonstrate key concepts – review of concepts is recommended =7.5 or below	Assignment below standard in demonstrating key concepts. Improvement required in areas noted = 8.0	Further development needed in areas noted = 8.5	Assignment demonstrates mastery of key skill areas. Further development in the areas noted would add to effectiveness = 9.0	Highly effective completion of assignment = 9.5	Assignment illustrates mastery of materials, skills or concepts = 10
--	--	---	---	---	--

MIT OpenCourseWare
<https://ocw.mit.edu>

15.281 Advanced Communication for Leaders
Spring 2016

For information about citing these materials or our Terms of Use, visit: <https://ocw.mit.edu/terms>.