Sample Guidelines for Oral Reports in Section

The following form illustrates how one can design a handout for students in a section to help them prepare for an oral report. In general, students tend to perform this type of exercise with far greater success when they receive clear guidelines beforehand about what the teaching fellow expects them to do.

Oral reports are intended to help you think about and synthesize the reading material in a logical manner. Good oral reports are therefore short and to the point. The theme of the assigned reading should be briefly discussed, but too much detail is monotonous and serves to obscure, rather than highlight, the main points. To encourage brevity, I am placing a five-minute limit on each report.

In addition to helping you to master the reading material, the main purpose of an oral report is to provide an interpretive “springboard” for the class discussion to follow. Individual styles will vary, but you should always try to accomplish the following when giving such a report:

1. Present the theme of the article (e.g., “What is the nature of Chinese cosmology?”).

2. Discuss the author’s interpretation of the theme and evaluate the success of the argument (e.g., “Chinese cosmology has no creation myth.”).

3. Relate the passage in question to the bigger picture—the other readings for the week or the general themes of the course.

4. Initiate discussion at the end by offering your assessment of the reading (e.g., “This reading draws too few comparisons with Western cosmology.”).

You should assume that the entire class has read and thought about the assignment. Thus, repetition of every point is unnecessary. Concentrate on analysis of the important issues and try to use these issues as a basis for discussion. By doing so, you and the other members of the class will benefit most from your report.