Some tips for giving good presentations in Philosophy

Structure. You should have a clear map of the logical structure of your presentation. For example, it might naturally fall into four sections, where section 1 clarifies the question and sets aside some potential misunderstandings, section 2 proposes an argument, section 3 considers possible objections to that argument, and section 4 briefly sums up. (This is only one possible structure, of course; in general, you should identify the appropriate structure after working out what you want to say, rather than expect your message to fit any particular standard template – every presentation is different!) Having worked out how to organise your material into a clear structure, *communicate that structure clearly to your audience* – this massively helps the audience to understand what you are saying. For example, it is generally a good idea to start the presentation by laying out the structure, and then explicitly announce when you are moving on to the next section.

Visual aids. Consider what level and type of visual aid (if any) might best help your audience to follow what you are saying, while also being compatible with your personal delivery style. Possibilities include Powerpoint-style slides, pre-printed handouts and real-time annotation on a whiteboard/flip-chart. Note that you have a choice of levels of detail (from brief bullet points to fuller summary). Try to avoid including so much detail on a visual aid that you end up simply reading from it – it is generally better to keep the visual aid relatively simple, and then talk 'around' it.

What do you really need to say, and what don't you need to say? You are bound to have numerous thoughts on the topic, including interesting ones well worthy of discussion, that are (however) relatively tangential to the central thread of your presentation. It is generally better to *exclude* these: your presentation will be much clearer if you stick to the *central* points. This also helps with time-keeping: if you try to include every thought you have, you will almost certainly struggle to keep your presentation within the allotted time limit. (If you really want to flag more peripheral issues for possible discussion, you can include pointers to them as a list of very brief bullet points in a postscript to your main presentation, if time permits.)

Timekeeping. Most presenters run over time. Whatever the context of your presentation (from class assignment to job interview, etc.), *it is important not to do this*. Practice your presentation in advance *and time it*, so that you know how long it will take you to cover the ground you plan to cover, and you have an opportunity to re-organise or cut material as necessary. This also gives you a chance to 'hear out loud' which parts of your presentation don't sound as clear as you'd like, and re-think those parts. When actually giving the presentation, have some form of stopwatch with you, so that you can check your progress (by now you should know how long each sub-section of your talk ought to take). (FWIW: When preparing professional talks for academic conferences, I usually find (i) that my first version is around 50-75% over the time limit, and (ii) that after cutting the talk down to meet the time limit my talk is much clearer, more streamlined, and generally better.)

Delivery. Make eye contact with your audience, and make sure you are not speaking (i) too fast or (ii) too quietly for the audience easily to make out what you are saying. Try not to read your presentation from a pre-prepared script – this tends to make the delivery 'wooden'. Try to avoid verbal ('umm') and physical (playing with your hair) tics. Try to communicate (in your tone and body language) that you care about the topic.

Stage fright. If you find presenting to an audience nerve-wracking, you are not alone. Try to stay calm, and if you're not calm, try not to show that. Yes, this is all a lot easier said than done. One trick I used to use was reading out (verbatim from a script) the first paragraph or so of my presentation, because I found that after getting started, I was able to relax into it a bit more. If you feel you've

made a mistake during your presentation, don't dwell on it over-much: it's fine (and helpful) to briefly correct it, but remember that the 'mistake' will seem much less significant to the audience than it perhaps feels to you. Other tips I've seen include paying attention to your breathing, and pausing for a sip of water now and again. The good news is that this gets a *lot* better with practice.

There is also plenty of advice on all this online- e.g. try running a search on 'tips for giving good presentations'.