Finding clues to success in the assignment description

If your oral presentation is a classroom assignment, the assignment description should always be your guide to success for any assignment. Here are some things to look for in the description of an oral presentation assignment.

* Is the presentation meant to inform or to persuade? Most class presentation assignments are informative. If the goal of your presentation is to persuade, convince, or promote, then make sure you keep this goal in mind as you structure your arguments.
* Is the content of your presentation drawn from a paper you have already researched or written? If so, you may not need to locate any new source material. Are you presenting material from a single source such as a book chapter? Do you need to find new resources?
* Who is your audience? If it is your classmates, are they mostly freshmen or upperclassmen? Are they students within your major, or are they unfamiliar with your topic? Have you all read the same background information? Keep your audience in mind as you make choices about your topic, the amount of background you provide, etc.
* How long should you speak? The amount of information and the detail you can convey will usually be less in a presentation than in a paper. A typical American speaks 120-150 words per minute. In a 5-minute presentation, you have time for perhaps 650-750 words. That is equivalent to 1.5 pages of single spaced type.
* Are you expected to handle questions at the end?
* Are you required or allowed to use visual aids? (See section on Visual Aids)
* Are you required or allowed to distribute a class handout?
* Does the instructor have any other special requirements?
* Most class presentations are expected to be extemporaneous. That means you are expected to draft the presentation and be well-rehearsed, but your tone should be conversational. You should not memorize or read the presentation from a script.