



PRESENTATION GUIDELINES

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Simple Guidelines on How to Make a Paper Presentation

You may have to present your paper to an audience during a conference or competition. This module gives you some guidelines on how to give a paper presentation.

You are usually given 15 minutes for presentation and 10 minutes for Question & Answer session. In a competition, Judges are usually rather strict and will spend 25 minutes only (subject to change) with you/your team.

Academic or Scientific oral presentations are not simply readings of your paper. Nevertheless, at an overall level, your academic talk should be organized into sections that parallel the sections in your paper. As in your paper, the key sections could be (depending on your paper):

1. **Introduction:** The rationale for the experiment (why I did this experiment/ studies/ research?)
2. **Methods:** The methods that were used (how I performed this experiment/ studies/ rese?)
3. **Results:** The results obtained (what is my findings?)
4. **Discussion:** An interpretation of those results (what does these findings mean?)

Although not part of a standard oral presentation, you should try to end your talk with:

5. **Critique and Group Discussion:** Your job as presenter is to not only present the paper, but also lead the discussion of its strengths, weaknesses, and broader implications. To help focus the after-presentation discussion, end your presentation with a list of approximately three major questions/ issues worthy of further discussion (see below).

Plan for your talk/ presentation to be about 15 minutes.

1. Introduction

The first 1 or 2 slides should introduce your subject to the audience. Very briefly (you only have about 15 minutes total) give a concise background. Explicitly state the question addressed in the paper. Start with the “big picture” and then immediately drive to how your study fits in the big picture (one or two sentences) One key difference of the talk versus the paper is that you should state your major conclusion(s) up front. That is, in a few sentences, tell the audience where you will lead them in this presentation.

2. Methods

There should be 1 or 2 methods slides that allow the audience to understand how the experiment/ study/ review *etc.* (depending on your paper type) was conducted. You might include a flow chart describing the “recipe” of your study. Do not put in details that might be appropriate in a paper (people can ask about them at the end if they are interested). For example, “extracellular, single-unit recording was used to measure ...” NOT: “The electrode impedance was 1 megaohm when measured at 1 kilohertz with a xx instrument...”. In other words, be careful not to include too much detail and avoid jargon where possible.

3. **Results**

The next slides should show the major results. If appropriate, it is nice to start with a slide showing the main problem you are addressing and/ or basic phenomenon you are studying or using for measurement or comparison. For example, if your paper is experimental based, this would remind your audience of the variables that were manipulated and introduces your audience to the basic unit of measure. Next, show figures that clearly illustrate the main results. Do not show charts of raw data. All figures should be clearly labeled. When showing figures, be sure to explain the figure axes before you talk about the data (*e.g.*, “the X axis shows time. The Y axis shows level of neural activity”).

4. **Discussion & Conclusions**

List the conclusions in clear, easy to understand language. You can read them to the audience. Also give one or two sentences about what this likely means (your interpretation) in the big picture (*i.e.* come full circle back to your introduction) and perhaps some future directions.

5. **Critique**

Please end your presentation with at least two or three major things that should be discussed. These should consist of things like: things that might be improved in the study, additional experiments that you think might be appropriate (better?), and general issues about object recognition (*i.e.* put the study in the “big picture” of the course).

Overall tips

- **Control of time.** For most conference presentations, interruptions are not allowed and questions are held until the end. For the relaxed discussion environment, you can choose to encourage questions or defer all questions (other than questions of clarification) until the end. In a competition setting, the judges may decide on that day what style they want to use. So be prepared for both.
- As a rule of thumb, you should have no more slides than the minutes allowed for the presentation, but less is better.
- Show enthusiasm for your topic. *Both enthusiasm and boredom are contagious.*
- As you put up each slide, have in mind the key points you want to make with that slide (one or two points). When you are preparing and designing the presentation, think: “Why is this slide in here?” If you cannot think of an important reason, the slide probably should not be in the presentation.
- Speak in short sentences and use easy to understand language. Avoid jargon. - *Practice, practice, practice.*
- With enough practice, you will find that once you are into a presentation, it will flow smoothly (you have already put the work in to creating the proper slides and have thoroughly practiced presenting the key points of each slide before you even walked into the room). However, because you may be facing a large audience, you may feel more nervous than during your practice sessions (often practiced alone). Thus, the goal is simply to “get started” with the presentation. Once you are started, the nervousness will disappear as you are now “in your familiar zone” (well-practiced). A very helpful tip here is to memorize your first one or two sentences. When you get up to speak, these will almost reflexively come out of your mouth and launch you into your presentation. *Remember, 95% of the work is done before you even show up to give the presentation.*
- Have clear slides, with large fonts and minimal clutter and slides are organized along the primary topics discussed above.
- Know the key points you want to make with each slide and have practiced - making those points.
- With practice, be confident that the presentation is at the expected time limit, so there is no reason to rush or become concerned with the clock.
- If the judges decide to interrupt you, stay calm and answer the judges and modify your presentation to keep to your time.

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