

GUIDE TO ORAL PRESENTATION OF RESEARCH RESULTS

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PROCEDURES

- ❑ Each person will have a maximum of 15 minutes for the presentation, with a 5 minute Q/A session. This is obviously not enough time for extended comments, but is a typical time allotment at a professional meeting. You should think of this as an extended abstract of your research results. A good moderator will cut you off if you go over time.
- ❑ If you have illustrations, and need to make overheads or slides, make sure they are large, easy to read, and not so complicated that the audience has trouble understanding them. A comfortable font size is equivalent to a Times New Roman 22 pt. Equipment that will be provided at the symposium will be: 1) a computer and projector for PowerPoint presentations; 2) one 35 mm slide projector; 3) overhead projector; and 4) laser pointer.
- ❑ This is a formal presentation you are expected to dress formally (suit and tie for men and equivalent dress for women). Formal dress is not always required in presentations, but dressing formally here will reinforce the importance of the presentation.

WHAT TO DISCUSS

Since your time is limited, and your research topics are substantial; and since you want to transmit as much useful information as possible; preparing your talk requires careful planning. You must step back from the intimate detail you have been immersed in during your research and see it in its totality, with everything in proper perspective.

Note that an oral presentation is different from a written presentation. The oral presentation is like the Abstract, concise and to the point. The written paper can be as long, and detailed as necessary to fully explore the subject.

CONTENT OF PRESENTATION

There are many ways to organize and present the results of your research. However, you should attempt to do as many of the following as possible.

CLEARLY STATE TITLE OF RESEARCH TOPIC AT BEGINNING

Don't leave your audience wondering what this talk is all about and acknowledgments.
(TITLE)

CONCISELY EXPLAIN WHAT YOU WERE TRYING TO ACCOMPLISH IN THE RESEARCH.

This may include your motivation for choosing the topic, but should focus on why this topic was important enough to spend a semester or two researching it (PURPOSE)

One of the ironies of this is that the reason for doing the research may not have been very clear before you began, or has changed substantially while doing the research. This is common. State the goals in light of what is genuinely important scientifically, no matter when you realized it was important.

CLEARLY STATE THE SCOPE OF YOUR RESEARCH; THE LARGER CONTEXT IN WHICH IT IS BASED. This does not have to be very long, but for a listener who knows nothing about the topic a general framework is important. If the audience is intimate with a topic this would not be necessary, but a strong rhetorical device is to focus the audience's attention.

Such an overview may also forestall criticism or hostile questioning. Many topics are very complex, as some of yours are, and you have had to narrow them down. If you make it clear what you are dealing with, and what not, you have a better chance of getting your points across.

ORDER OF PRESENTATION.

There are two basic ways to approach your presentation. (1) Give your conclusions first and then present the evidence and arguments which led to those conclusions, or (2) start with details and construct an argument leading to your conclusions.

The first approach will capture the attention of your audience much more effectively. It takes focused concentration for the audience to absorb the details of your research and to follow the logic when they do not know where that logic is going, especially when you are talking fast. And in a forum where many talks are being given the audience will begin to falter if the presentations are too tedious and require too much focused attention. An oral presentation in 15 minutes is just not the forum for a discussion of technical detail.

PRESENT THE RESULTS OF YOUR RESEARCH IN AN OBJECTIVE AND BALANCED MANNER.

This part is the bulk of your presentation. You need to get across the quintessence of a complex topic, in a short amount of time, in a way that the listener goes away not only impressed, but also more knowledgeable of and intrigued by the topic.

DRAW AND PRESENT CLEAR CONCLUSIONS ABOUT THE RESULTS OF YOUR RESEARCH.

Your audience should not leave wondering what your presentation means. Clearly bring the presentation to closure.

Your conclusions should be as objective as the rest of your presentation, but it is permissible to close with personal opinions. You may have opinions about the significance of the topic you researched, why it is important, what lessons come from it, or where it might go in the future. Just make sure it is clear you have left objective discussion of results.

QUALITY OF PRESENTATION

How you say it is as important as what you say. I'm sure people in the communications department have explicit advice on how to make oral presentations. If you have had a course in public speaking, now is the time to put into practice those skills. The following things to watch for are just common sense.

- Don't lean, slouch, or hide behind the podium.
- Project your voice clearly and distinctly. Judge the size of the room, how full and noisy it is, and make sure everyone can hear you clearly, without blasting them away.
- Avoid like the plague the "Ahhhh"s and "Uhhhhh"s used to fill in the pauses while you think of what to say next. Dead silence feels awkward when you are doing it, but it is better than your audience counting the number of times you use the pause sounds. If you have trouble with this, practice your talk until you quit doing it.
- Make sure that all overheads or slides are clear enough people in the back of the room can see and read them.

PREPARATION FOR PRESENTATION

I advise you to give one or more practice runs of your presentation before doing it in public. Begin in a room by yourself. Set a timer. Stand up in front where you intend to stand. Have whatever notes, props, illustrations you need ready and in position. Then give the presentation as if the room were full. Imagine people sitting out there looking at you. Look them in the eyes. Imagine yourself in the audience watching yourself give the talk. Do it several times.

Try also to give the talk before a friend who will honestly critique your presentation. Giving a talk to an empty room may feel strange, but giving it in a room with someone else there is even stranger.