

Leadership Alliance

Presentation Guidelines

Summer 2004



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Presentation Guidelines

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Oral Presentations

All academicians, whether they are in the sciences, social sciences or humanities, have to make presentations. They have to stand up in front of a room or auditorium full of strangers or colleagues and share their research findings. All researchers live by the adage of “publish or perish,” which can also be read “present or you can’t publish.” An abstract presented at a national meeting as a 10-minute talk can later form the core of a published article or the seed for an entire book. Speaking is an essential part of developing as a researcher, and is an essential form of educational communication.

For a junior researcher, one of the most important occasions for speaking is the 10-minute presentation, and this is the focus of these guidelines. If you can plan a 10-minute talk, then you can plan a 50-minute talk—the same principles apply. Here are several key things to remember when delivering a paper:

- * Pitch your presentation to coincide with the knowledge level of your audience. A presentation to your classmates is different from one at a meeting of professional researchers, or to a group of high school science students.
- * Type out your presentation, word for word, using only a few words on each line, as if you were reading a tele-prompter. Use all caps or if you have the Oracle font, which is made for speeches, use that. Try it out loud enough times so that you can comfortably look up and proceed without looking at it.
- * Speak loudly enough to be heard in the back of the room or auditorium. If you normally have a light or high-pitched voice, work to deepen and project it. People with particularly deep or low-pitched voices should work to pitch it a bit higher to avoid mumbling. If you are working with a microphone, remember to ask the audience if they can hear you before you begin your presentation. Enunciate each word clearly, and do not trail off at ends of sentences. As you speak, try to make regular eye contact with the audience, which will help to keep them engaged in the presentation. Remember, this is a talk, not a reading.
- * Project a professional image. You know the material and you are there to communicate that knowledge to the audience.

- * Expect to be nervous. Everyone is, no matter how old they are or how long they have been doing presentations. They have just had more practice and are more at ease because of it.
- * Dress in a way that will not distract from your presentation. Dark, solid colors and suits work best. For women, avoid short skirts and high heels.
- * Speak at a natural, not rushed, speed. If your material exceeds the 10 minutes, edit it before presenting. Don't try to rush through the presentation; it will only diminish its effectiveness, increase your nervousness, and disengage the audience.
- * During the question and answer period (if there is one), don't be afraid to say you haven't researched or tested the hypothesis in question, but try to relate the question to your project and its results, if possible. This will show that you know how to relate the unknown to the known, and that you can do it extemporaneously.

FORMAT

An effective 10-minute presentation should include the following information:

- * **Title:** A title that specifically describes what you done. For example, "The effect of growth hormone on bone development in the neonatal rat" is much more informative than "Hormone studies in the rat."
- * **Statement of Goals:** A statement of the goal and very brief background of the study - what research question are you asking and why are you asking it?
- * **Description:** Brief description of methods. How is your study designed? What key method(s) are you using?
- * **Results:** What data have you obtained? If you have not obtained any data, what did you expect your results to be and why?
- * **Discussion:** How have you (or would you) interpret your results? How do (or would) the results answer the initial question that your study was designed to answer? Are there any problems to discuss? What would you do next and why?

- * Summary: You may use a slide or overhead to list the main points of your talk.

It should be organized into the following format and times:

- * Introduction: Summarize what you did, why you did it and how you did it (2 minutes).
- * Message or Results: Provide no more than 3-4 facts(6 minutes).
- * Conclusion: Give a brief summary of the results as well as the conclusion(s) you drew, and mention the horizons this work opens up (2 minutes).

You will have to organize your talk carefully and decide what important points you want to make in that brief time. For longer presentations, you can expand on the above model. Timing is especially important for the conclusion. Since you will want to save several minutes for questions, watch the clock.

VISUAL AIDS

The most common visual aid is the slide and these should be used to aid your presentation. Designing clear visual material that you can use easily is a key part of preparing a good presentation.

Usually, in a 10-minute presentation there is time for only five or six overheads or slides, if you discuss them well. Use no more than eight slides for a 10-minute talk, and never, even if you are giving a long seminar, have more than the equivalent of a slide per minute. You will be rushing if you use more than that.

Rehearse your talk with a timer, and get ready far enough ahead of time so you can make changes in the slides or overheads if you find errors or problems.

Poster Presentations

A poster session is a presentation of the results of a recent field or research project that can be described graphically. Presenters post materials such as maps, photographs, graphs, charts and/or tables on a display board along with textual summaries of their work.

Poster sessions provide a more intimate forum for exchange than do regular paper presentations by facilitating informal discussions between presenters and their audience. Ideally, a well-constructed poster will be self-explanatory and free you from answering obvious questions so that you are available to supplement and discuss particular points of interest. Plan the presentation so that you are not obliged to devote most of your time to merely explaining your poster to a succession of visitors.

Plan on an exciting interaction with your "audience." Poster sessions are an innovative and challenging way for you to present your data and new ideas and to meet colleagues in a creative setting. The greater informality of poster presentation encourages discussion between interested parties, and indeed encourages preliminary dissemination of results and theories before finalization in print or in a formal lecture.

COVERAGE

- * Have you provided all the obvious information?
- * Will a casual observer walk away understanding your major findings after a quick perusal of your material?
- * Will a more careful reader learn enough to ask informed questions?

In addition to a title/author label and abstract, most successful posters provide brief statements of introduction, method, subjects, procedure, results and conclusions. Ask yourself, "What would I need to know if I were viewing this material for the first time?" and then state that information clearly.

CLARITY

- * Is the sequence of information evident? Indicate the ordering of your material with numbers, letters or arrows, when necessary.
- * Is the content being communicated clearly?
- * Keep it simple. Place your major points in the poster and save the non-essential, but interesting sidelights for informal discussion.
- * Be selective. Your final conclusions or summary should leave observers focused on a concise statement of your most important findings.

LAYOUT

The poster display should fit on one upright panel, approximately 4 x 6 or 4 x 8 ft. raised from the floor to eye level. Remember that your illustrations will be viewed from a distance of 3 ft. (91 cm) or more. People attending a poster session are free to move about from poster to poster, so presenters should limit the text to four or five pages of double-spaced, 16-20 point text.

Material should be presented from left to right, starting at the top left of the panel, under the title. Presenters should use minimal amount of text consistent with providing enough information to emphasize essential data and/or stimulate discussion. It helps the viewer a great deal if you can indicate (by numbers, letters, or arrows) a preferred sequence that might be followed in studying your material.

Lettering needs to be large enough to read from several feet away, so it should be at least 3/4" - 3/8" high in a bold font, or if hand-lettered, written with a regular felt-tip pen (not fine point). Avoid using all capital letters since they are hard to read. Push pins are used to secure your posters to the provided poster board stands.

Extensive, imaginative use of captioned illustrations, photographs, graphs or other types of visually appealing material is the point of a poster presentation.

Use of color can be very helpful both in maximizing the clarity of diagrams and in making the poster attractive. Do not simply mount the text of your paper as a "poster." It will not be effective in this medium.

At the same time, try to keep everything as simple as possible. Charts, drawings, and illustrations might well be similar to slides, but with less detail. Avoid overly ornate presentations—block coloring can be useful to add emphasis and clarity. Photographs should be matted and finished to enhance visibility. Captions should be brief and labels few but informative. All illustrations, drawings, charts, pictures, graphs, figures, other visual aids, and written text should be sufficiently large to allow them to be read or seen easily from a distance of 5 ft.

TITLE

The title should be bold and informative. Each poster display should include a lettered sign banner giving the title and the name(s) of the presenter(s).

This sign should be 6" in height and up to 18" long and be mounted at the top of the poster board.

CONTENT

Is the topic and its treatment appropriate for a poster? Excessive quantities of facts and particularly subtle arguments tend not to be appreciated, especially if the author is not immediately available to act as guide.

Arrange the material in a logical sequence, and make sure the poster is self-contained if it will be on display in the author's absence. It is helpful to start with a concise introduction and end with brief conclusions, particularly when the participants have an overwhelming choice competing for their attention.

HANDOUTS

If you would like people to have a permanent record, have handouts available, either from the author or in a folder attached to the poster board.

PowerPoint Guidelines

The major guiding concept behind a good presentation is keeping things simple. To that end, we offer the following suggestions.

To maximize legibility and compatibility, please keep the following stylistic guidelines in mind.

FONTS

- * Fancier or more ornate fonts are more difficult to read, and may not be available on the computer used for the presentation. To that end, please restrict yourself to the core set of fonts, namely:

- Arial
- Comic Sans
- Georgia
- Times New Roman
- Trebuchet MS
- Verdana
- Symbol (for Greek letters and mathematical symbols)

- * Use font sizes that would be clearly legible; avoid cramming text onto a slide. Font sizes for slide headers should be 30-44 points, while slide text can be anywhere from 18-30 points. Anything smaller will be very difficult to read.

COLORS

- * Use solid, clear colors. A dark background with light-colored text and graphics work very well for most presentations.
- * Make sure that the colors used in the text and graphics provide sufficient contrast from the background. For example, a 50% blue is very hard to read from a black background.
- * Avoid using many colors on a slide—they will confuse the audience and make the slide harder to read. For example, bright reds, blues, and/or greens at the same time are extremely difficult to read together.
- * Use your colors to organize the different parts of the slide. For example, use one color for the slide title and a different color for your slide text.
- * Be tasteful in your use of colors. Don't let them distract your audience from your message!

ANIMATION

- * If you want to use animation, keep it simple. While it may be fun to have a slide zoom around the screen while it comes up, it takes up valuable talk time and is a major distraction for the audience.

To get a feel for how the presentation will appear to your audience, practice giving your talk while looking at the screen from about one to one and-a-half arm's length away. That'll be approximately how large the projected image will be to the audience. If the text and/or graphics are hard to read from that distance, then it will be hard for your audience to read, too.

Use the PowerPoint timer feature while practicing your talk to see how your talk is paced.

If you like it, use the PowerPoint notes feature to make various notes to yourself or to outline salient points for each slide—you can print out notes pages for each slide and use those as a guideline to keep you on track during your talk.

MOVIES

- * If you'd like to use movies, make sure that you include a stand-alone copy of the movie file on your disc with your presentation. It is your responsibility to make sure that your movie will play on different platforms and operating systems.

The following movie formats are supported:

- * QuickTime Movie
- * Windows AVI
- * MPEG-2

DVDs are not supported at this time.

IMAGES AND GRAPHICS

If you import images and graphics into your PowerPoint presentations, you should also bring along the original image files, as well as any data files or source files you used to generate those images or graphics. In the event that there is a problem reading your embedded images or graphics, having those files with you will make the troubleshooting and problem-solving process a lot easier.

TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS

FOR LEADERSHIP ALLIANCE POWERPOINT PRESENTATIONS

We support disks in either Mac OS or PC formats.

The following file formats are supported:

- * Microsoft PowerPoint 98, 2001, and X (Mac OS)
- * Microsoft PowerPoint 97, 2000, and XP (Windows)
- * JPEG or TIFF Slideshow (numerically ordered filenames)

Please save presentations on one of the following media:

- * 3.5 inch high density floppy disk
- * Zip Disk (100 MB or 250 MB)
- * CD-R or CD-RW

Mark on the disc the following information:

- * Your name, address, and e-mail address
- * Your institution
- * Name of your PowerPoint presentation file
- * Number of slides
- * PowerPoint version and operating system (Mac OS or Windows)

IMPORTANT

PowerPoint presentations must be submitted for testing and compilation at least three days prior to the symposium. Either Marcus Jones (New York University) or Vernorris Kelly (Brown University) will review your presentation to determine whether there are any technical problems. If you are participating in a summer research program at NYU, Columbia, University of Colorado or University of Pennsylvania, please e-mail your presentation to jonesm02@med.nyu.edu. All other students should e-mail presentations to Vernorris_Kelly@brown.edu.

In addition, you must attend a session for PowerPoint presenters on Friday, July 30, to verify that your presentation has been received and tested.

Slides or Transparencies

Presenters should keep in mind a number of factors when preparing slides or transparencies for use in a presentation. The suggestions below are provided as guidelines for preparing legible slides and transparencies.

LAYOUT

- * Do not use hand-drawn materials.
- * Typeset all slides and transparencies.
- * Use a text or numeric font between 9 and 14 points.
- * Use a non-serif font (such as Helvetica) with a heavy line thickness (boldface).
- * Prepare graphs and charts with a heavy line thickness.
- * Use dashed, dotted, or colored lines to make graphs more readable instead of varying the line thickness.

- * Use bright colors.
- * Use dark colors for the background.
- * Avoid gray shades.
- * Present photographs and remotely sensed images in color.

CONTENT

- * Use short headings.
- * Eliminate material that is not essential to the presentation.
- * Select only key figures or parts of an equation to illustrate a point.
- * Do not put entire paragraphs on a slide or transparency.
- * Show information piece by piece, building to the final details.
- * Show additional details in an overview diagram with a sectional breakout of details.
- * Use two projectors or two overheads when showing a sectional breakout of details (e.g., use a detailed chart on one and breakout on the other).
- * Cover qualifying statements verbally.
- * Use simple block diagrams rather than intricate schematics.
- * Remember that most slide shows and overhead projections are viewed in darkened or totally dark rooms.
- * When preparing a presentation, remember that the average viewer is approximately 20-80 feet away from the screen.

THE LEADERSHIP ALLIANCE

The Leadership Alliance is a consortium of twenty-nine of this nation's leading research and teaching academic institutions, including minority serving institutions, all dedicated to improving the participation of underrepresented students in graduate studies and Ph.D. programs and, ultimately, research professions in the academic, public and private sectors.