

# Presentation on Presentations

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Much of this presentation and my own thinking on presenting well is based on advice received from Nancy Rose (MIT) and Florian Zettelmeyer's (Kellogg) excellent and publically available "Some pointers for preparing presentations." This presentation draws heavily on their advice.

# We have two central aims for this workshop

1. Offer some advice on how to maximize the effectiveness of your presentations
2. Provide opportunity for feedback on current research

# Most presentations fall short of their goals

## MOST PRESENTERS

- Rush to get through all their slides
- Avoid questions
- Try to make their research seem hard
- Have conversations with the screen
- Attempt to tell their audience everything

# By delivering a good presentation, you maximize your chances for impact

- There is no substitute for good ideas well executed
- But even the best research suffers when poorly presented

## WHAT PRESENTERS SHOULD DO

- Tell a story that engages and persuades



**EVERY TALK IS A JOB TALK**

# There are four steps to developing an effective presentation



# Once you have done your research, the next step is developing your story



# Advance effort spent structuring your presentation reaps substantial rewards

- Think backwards: what do you want people to remember?
- Do not try to say everything
- Create islands of sanity
- Have a logical plan
  - This is almost certainly NOT an intellectual history of your research
  - Refine this with feedback
- Empathize with your audience

# Good presentations can and should help structure your paper

- If your slides don't flow, your paper probably doesn't either
- Take thoughtful notes
- Revise your slides to incorporate feedback and your own insights
  - Common questions
  - Breaks in the flow
  - Examples that really work



# All presentations should follow some basic guidelines

- State the research question early and clearly
- Motivate that research question
- Be upfront about limitations
- Tell (and help audience recognize) a story

# Theoretical researchers, remember: You are an economist not a mathematician

- Describe the environment clearly
- Introduce notation and state assumptions early
  - Know why assumptions matter
- State main results
  - Unless proof is insightful or very innovative, skip details
- Discuss intuition
  - Convince audience results are useful and not obvious
- Simple examples and figures often help

# Empirical researchers, remember: You are an economist not a statistician

- Have a basic theoretical framework
  - At least some economic reasoning
- Describe data clearly
- Present your identification strategy
  - But not before you tell us why you are bothering
- Write down the model you are estimating

# Think of your task as planning a presentation not just preparing slides

- Your paper and presentation are two chances to tell a story
- Structuring your slides helps you figure out that story
- Slides are not there to remind you what to say
- Slides help your audience follow your story
- Capitalize your mental efforts into the presentation



**PREPARATION ALLOWS YOU TO FOCUS ON DELIVERY, INTERACTION AND HAVING FUN**

# Slide preparation should focus on clarity; Tell your story



# Writing effective slides is important and it takes work

- Do not put off writing slides to the last minute
- Take some time to reflect and run through slides as if you were in the audience

# Use slide titles to structure your presentation and guide your audience

- Each slide should convey one main point
- Slide titles should contain this message
- Your slide titles should summarize your talk
- Makes it easier for your audience to reengage



**SLIDES SHOULD HELP AUDIENCE  
UNDERSTAND YOU**

# Effective presentations manage timing carefully

- Practice and time your presentation
- Be realistic
- For work-in-process: guide audience's feedback
- Keep signposts of where you should be at various time markers
  - Try to stick to this schedule
  - Have a plan to get back on track if you don't
  - This is particularly important for empirical work
- Plan your conclusion and know when to start it



# Use related literature to create context

## YOUR PRESENTATION IS NOT A BOOK REPORT

- You must know the related literature
- But describe only what is immediately relevant
- Use presentation time to talk about what you do

# Slide mechanics matter

- Avoid small fonts and presentation bling
- Give people some white space
- Do not attach meaning to colors
- Always consider your audience

# Effective tables and figures take more work than you think

## TABLES

- Spell out variable names; use actual words
- Reproduce only most important results
  - Refer readers to paper for full results
- Copying table from your pdf is generally useless

## FIGURES

- Describe the axes and what lines represent



**TELL THE AUDIENCE THE MESSAGE  
DON'T MAKE THEM GUESS**

# Solid preparation lets you focus on effective delivery



**BUT THAT IS A TOPIC FOR ANOTHER WORKSHOP**

**THANK YOU**

The following slides give some additional, idiosyncratic pointers on presenting itself. There is much more information out there on presenting effectively. Not all of it will work for you, but it is certainly worth thinking more about how to present well. Just consume the information critically.

# A few simple things can make you a better public speaker

- Relax
- Smile
- Breathe

...frequently

# A few technical items and tricks can help further

- Stand to the left of your slides if at all possible\*
- Use a clicker
- Practice out-loud
- Seriously. OUT LOUD. It seems ridiculous, but it helps
- Experiment with what helps you relax
- Consider getting targeted instruction
- If you are uncomfortable with public speaking, consider joining Toastmasters or something similar

\*When people read from left-to-right (as in English), their “home base” is to the left of the material. You want that to be you, not dead space. Note: Ignore this rule if the it would be awkward in the room in which you’re presenting.



# Make your first five minutes count

- Your chance to hook the audience
- Tell them what question you asked, what you found and why they should care
- Practice these first five minutes
- Over and over and over and ...



**YOU MUST CLEARLY STATE AND MOTIVATE  
YOUR RESEARCH QUESTION IN THE FIRST 5  
MINUTES**

# Handling questions well is almost as important as “presenting”

- Seminars are about two-way communication
- Stop! Listen to the questions
- Be respectful and friendly
- If you cannot answer, acknowledge the point and say you will think about it
- Actually think about it
- If you cannot resolve a debate, politely move on



**YOU ARE SELLING YOURSELF,  
NOT YOUR PAPER**

Beyond presentations, there is still a lot of room to maximize your impact and enjoyment

... Yes, I said enjoyment

# The quality of writing can make or break a paper

## WRITE WELL

- If writing does not come naturally to you
  - Get better at it
  - Find someone for whom it does
- Remember: you are telling a story
- Proofread

# There are many resources available to improve your writing

## USE THEM!

- Most universities have writing centers
- Several books are worth reading
  - McCloskey, “Economical Writing”
  - Thompson, “A Guide for the Young Economist”
  - Orwell’s essays on writing

# Tiny things can have an enormous effect on the job market

- Prepare
  - Answers to common questions
  - Research people you would like to work with
- Don't schedule important interviews at bad times
- Bring snacks and hand sanitizer
- Remember: econ world is small; word travels fast
- Exercise before the job market starts in earnest
- Take heart: This is a two-sided market
- Have fun!

# There are lots of other resources available

- Zettermeyer's "Some Pointers for Preparing Presentations". Find it. Read it. Use it. Send him a thank you note.
- David Levin's "Cheap Advice for..."
- Toastmasters clubs for improving your public speaking
- And many more



**USE THEM AND HAVE FUN**

**GOOD LUCK!**