

# Presentation Guidelines

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Your goal as a presenter is to convey the main contribution of your paper to the audience, so that we can easily and accurately assess the contribution of the paper. Your presentation must answer: what is the research question of the paper? Why is that an important question to answer? Why hasn't the literature arrived at a convincing answer already? How does your paper answer that question? What is the answer to the question? And: is it convincing?

This may seem like a lot to do in 30 minutes. It is only possible to do if you think clearly and carefully about your paper, *and your presentation of it*. This is a very hard skill to learn, but absolutely crucial not for a successful career in economics. These notes are meant to help you start writing good presentations.

As second years, none of you will have perfect presentations, and that's okay. There will be a lot of learning by doing, so pay attention not only to your own presentation but your classmates' as well.

## Ground Rules

The following rules are mandatory:

1. No more than 15 slides. Fewer are even better. You need to leave ample time for questions and discussion, and this is not possible if you are rushing to get through all your slides. This will also force you to think hard about where the core of your paper is. Plan for 2-3 minutes per slide, including questions.
2. No more than 3 slides for your introduction (I give you a template below).
3. No literature review slide (we don't have time for that). However, the relation to the literature should be explained during the talk.
4. When answering questions: (1) let the person asking the question finish speaking; (2) think for two to five seconds; (3) if the question was a yes/no question, your first words must be "yes," "no," or "it depends"; (4) answer the question as clearly and concisely as possible.
5. Practice your presentation at least twice before giving it to the group.

## Introduction of the Talk

The introduction is the most important part of the presentation. You need people to be able to walk away from the introduction knowing the answer to every question posed at the beginning of this document, except "is it convincing?" Here is a simple three slide template for an effective introduction. Of course, no presentation will fit neatly into this template, but it is meant to as a suggestion to get you started.

*Slide 1: Motivation.* This slide needs to tell the audience what question the paper is trying to answer, why that is an important question, and why the literature does not have a good answer yet. Ideally, you won't need more than four bullets to accomplish this:

- Bullet 1: the research question.
- Bullet 2: why that question is important (can also be said in words or as a sub-bullet).

- Bullets 3-4: why the literature has not answered the question satisfactorily yet. As an intermediate step, you may have to briefly say what the literature has done, but only very broadly.

Sometimes it will make more sense to switch the order of bullets 1 and 2: first describe an interesting issue the paper is trying to understand, and then a natural research question about that issue. But the first two bullets must convey the research question of the paper, and why that question is important to answer.

Distilling the essence of the research question into a few bullets is incredibly hard and will take a lot of thought. But don't feel like this is wasted time, because it is the most important part of the presentation – once you do this, the rest will come naturally.

*Slide 2: What the paper does.* This slide needs to describe how the paper actually answers the question. This could be by building a model with certain key features, by running a regression using certain variation in the data, etc. No matter what kind of paper it is, there will be something new here that allows the paper to answer its question. Be extremely clear about what that is.

*Slide 3: Main results.* This slide needs to describe the main results that come out of what the paper does. Some people try to be mysterious about what the main results are in the introduction, so that the audience is on the edge of their seat throughout the presentation, waiting for the answer. Don't do this. Your job is not to keep the audience entertained, but to convey the main contribution of the paper. When the audience knows the main results from the beginning, it allows them to focus on the parts of the rest of the talk which are important for the main contribution of the paper. If the audience does not know what to focus on, they get restless and can ask unimportant questions that do not contribute to our understanding of the paper's contribution.

Sometimes, there is no clear dividing line between what the paper does and what the main results are (for example, if the methodology is a contribution of the paper). So there will naturally be some slippage of the content in terms of these two categories. But the main points of these template slides – what the paper does, and what the main results are – must be clear.

## **Body of the Talk**

At this point you will get into the body of the talk, which is much harder to give a template for. As a rough guide, follow the general structure of the paper, but be aware that you will not be able to cover nearly everything in the paper.

It is helpful for the audience if the first slide after your introduction is an outline of the rest of the talk. At any given point in the talk, you will be in some of the details of the paper so it's useful for the audience to have a big picture to refer back to.

## **Presentation Tips**

When going through a figure, follow this format: (1) give a 1-2 sentence summary of what the main point of the figure is; (2) describe what the axes measure; (3) describe what the contents of the figure measure; (4) interpret the graph; (5) end by repeating the main point of the figure.

Go through a table in a similar way: (1) explain the main point of the table; (2) describe the layout of the table (rows, columns, etc.); (3) describe the variables and which units they are measured in; (4) interpret the entries of the table; (5) end by repeating the main point of the table.

Don't be defensive when people ask you questions. They are simply trying to understand the paper, not point out something they think you don't understand about the paper. If you don't know the answer, say so – we will all help you out!

Think about potential questions before the talk, and write out your answers to those questions. Questions make up 20-30% of a presentation, and are a key form of communication. It's silly not to have practiced it. Even if you get a question you haven't anticipated, chances are you will have thought about a related question.

When speaking, always use economics, not math. For example, instead of saying “ $w^*$  is increasing in  $b$  because  $U$  is increasing in  $b$ ,” say, “the reservation wage is higher when an unemployed worker receives more benefits because the benefits decrease the cost of being unemployed, allowing the worker to be more selective in accepting job offers.”

When presenting a model, first go through the setup of the model, and then get to the results of the model. Don't mix and match setup and results; it's confusing to people who have never seen it before.

Only put numbers, equations, graphs, etc. that you actually intend to talk about. So don't write out ten lines of algebra if you only care about the last one.

The title of your slide should tell the audience what the point of the current slide is, in terms of the main argument of the paper.

When speaking, use transitions between slides. At the start of each slide, tell the audience what the main point of the slide is in terms of the main argument, and how it relates to the previous slide. Then at the end of the slide tell the audience the main point again.

Often times you will be tempted to write something down on the slide that comes from the paper, but that you don't have a clear understanding of. Don't do this. Push yourself to understand as much as possible, and then if you still don't, talk to some classmates.

Don't put a graph in your introduction. You want people to focus on the big picture at this point, not on what units the  $x$  axis is in.

## **Credits**

Some of the material in this guide comes from Matthias Doepke's "[Rules for Presentations](#).”