Preparing and Presenting Your Seminar

Constructing Your Presentation

- Structure:
  - The Title should be descriptive and informative. In addition, it should accurately reflect what will be presented in the seminar.
  - Introduction (~20%) Introduce your topic; explain why it is important and interesting. Sometimes it helps to relate an anecdote to capture your audience’s interest. Give any necessary history and follow with a brief overview of what you will be talking about.
  - Body (~70%) Tell your story
  - Summary / Conclusion (~10%) Summarize for your audience what you just told them, and discuss what additional work needs to be done.
  - Provide perspective (your point of view). Use the studies you cite to evaluate your thesis statement.
  - Try to focus on a central message without too many diversions.
  - Develop your ideas in a logical sequence.
    - Provide a foundation so everyone can understand the topic.
    - Explain how each study relates back to your thesis.
    - Lead your audience - perhaps ask rhetorical questions.
    - Distinguish between solid evidence and speculation.
    - Include specifics (statistics, details of how studies were conducted, charts showing results of studies, etc.) where appropriate.
  - Credit your sources (e.g. Name, Year on slide).
  - Keep your audience oriented. Provide a guide to your presentation near the beginning, then show it again periodically throughout the talk. Let the audience know where you’re going.
  - Most topics will have some debate associated with them. For example, some mechanisms might be under dispute or the importance of certain data might be under dispute. Discuss these debates – they make talks much more interesting.
  - Pay attention to the transition between one slide and the next. These should be smooth, with some sort of reasonable connection. Practice getting from one slide to the next with a connecting phrase.
  - Prepare a summary or conclusions slide, as well as a take-home message, which can be
written or verbal. Either way, it will focus the audience’s attention. Prepare:

- Prepare an ending so that you don’t drift off into unfocused rambling. For example, thank the audience for their attention, and offer to answer any questions that they may have.

**Enhancing Your Presentation with Illustrations**

- Use sufficient figures, tables, and pictures to illustrate your points, but avoid excess or superfluous illustrations.

- Simpler is usually better than more complex

- Fewer illustrations per slide are usually better than more.

- Simplify tables by recreating them or highlighting important parts with boxes. Edited material should be indicated (e.g. Modified from Schoff, et al., 2007)

- All illustrations should be large enough to be easily seen in the back of the room.

- Properly credit pictures and figures. Some material is copyrighted and cannot be used or can be used only with certain citation. If you use a picture that has no obvious copyright, paste the address in small font below it. If you use a figure or table from a website, cite the author; if you get them from a paper, use a full citation. NOTE - these citations can be very small and won’t distract from the slide.

**Planning Ahead**

- Reduce your presentation to an outline or a series of notes for your own use.

- Be able to summarize each study in 2 or 3 sentences.

- Learn and practice correct pronunciations of unfamiliar words.

- Be familiar with details like experimental animals used, number of replicates, statistical tests used, etc.

- Rehearse by yourself and to one or more friends or colleagues.

  *Note! The actual presentation usually takes less time than a rehearsal.*

- Make sure that your presentation “works” on the laptop that you’ll be using for the actual seminar. Many technical glitches occur when different laptops are connected to the projecting machinery.

  - If your laptop does not work, you can use mine. But – make sure that the animation, fonts (especially symbols), etc. is the compatible.

- Bring a backup file of your presentation along with you.

**Presenting Effectively**
· Dress appropriately.

· Communicate clearly.
  · Avoid jargon
  · Avoid abbreviations (where it is possible); explain necessary abbreviations often
  · Use a pointer to draw your audience’s attention to important details on your slides but use it judiciously.
  · Speak slowly (we tend to speed up when we’re nervous)

· Avoid distracting mannerisms; e.g.
  · excessive hand movements
  · wandering around the front of the room.

· DO NOT READ YOUR SLIDES!

· “Walk” through complex data slides. Realize that the audience may not be able to take in all of the details; you’ll have to guide them through; e.g.
  · What do the X and Y axes represent?
  · Which part of the curve is important to make your point?

· At the conclusion of your presentation – STOP!
  · You need to have a planned ending to your talk

· Thank the audience for their attention or for the opportunity to speak to them.

· Volunteer to answer questions

**Delivery**

· Attitude / Style
  · Relax and slow down.
  · Practice (and perhaps write out) your opening statement
  · Use note cards (don't memorize, don't read)
  · Language - use "heightened conversation", personal, vivid
  · Be enthusiastic!!!

· Voice
  · Speak loudly enough for the room.
  · Articulate!
  · Emphasize the ends of sentences.
  · Avoid monotony in volume, speed, and rhythm.
  · Repeat a phrase, or pause for emphasis
  · Avoid the use of “uh,” “ok?”,”right?”,”you know?”,”like,” and other distracting filler words.

· Mannerisms and body language
Look at your audience -- maintain eye contact
Good posture
Move around
Use gestures and body language

Distractions
Many of the points listed above could fall into the category of “distractions”, which are defined as “anything that removes the listener’s attention from the subject (your presentation)”. Slides that are hard to follow, fonts that need work to interpret, long pauses or confusion over what’s coming next…. all of these things will make the audience think about something other than your data. That’s why guidelines like “simpler slides are better” and “practice slide transitions” are valuable. Following them will help you avoid distractions, and will help keep everyone’s attention and focus on the subject.

Answering questions
· Repeat the question; usually the audience can’t hear them and it gives you time to think.
· Give a brief and focused answer.
· If you don’t know the answer, say so, and perhaps make an educated guess. Don't try to bluff!

1. Modified from Lyle Shannon and Amanda Little, 2007