



How to Make a Presentation

A Guideline for Presentations in English Linguistics

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Manual for Seminars in English Linguistics

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Jun. 2008, updated Jan. 2016, Nov. 2016, Oct. 2020

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1 Introduction

If you make a presentation in your seminar, this guideline will help you organize the content and structure of your presentation. Please pay close attention to the following guidelines, which you should use as a kind of checklist when preparing your presentation.

A good presentation serves several **purposes**:

- It gives an overview of the way an original research paper relates to the broader chapter/topic discussed in class.
- It gives an overview of the content, the procedure and the timing of the research reported in the paper.
- It discusses the study critically and outlines the significance it has for the broader topic discussed in class.
- It is entertaining and contains some interactive elements (e.g., in-class experiments, videos, brief games, etc.).

There are **five components** to the success of any presentation:

- 1) **Structure**: Have a clear organization.
- 2) **Essentials**: Stick to the main points and do not get lost in detail.
- 3) **Illustration**: Use examples, visual aids, videos, soundbites, games, interactive elements wherever suitable.
- 4) **Timing**: Stick to the time limit.
- 5) **Rehearse**: A well-rehearsed presentation will be a lot better for the audience and less stressful for you.

Here are some **general pointers** concerning layout and level:

- Avoid fancy slide layouts: The background and layout of the slides should be unobtrusive and allow sufficient space for your materials.
- Keep the slides readable: Anything below font size 18/20 will be illegible for people not sitting in the front row.
- Keep the slides tidy: Do not put too much text on one slide (approx. 30-40 words max per slide, or 5-6 bullet points max.). Use bullet points rather than full sentences.
- Stay within the time limit: A good rule of thumb is that you have one slide for about one to two minutes. For instance, for a twenty-minute presentation, you should not have more than 15-20 slides in total. Check with your instructor how long the presentation is supposed to be.
- Do not just read off your slides: Your slides give the audience some visual support when they listen to you. In other words, the focus is on what you say, and the slides supplement this.
- Tailor your presentation to the audience: The most important question to consider in this respect is what your audience knows prior to your presentation. If the other students have all read the paper you present, you can assume more background knowledge compared to if they have only read a book chapter etc. which deals with broader issues. In general, you should anticipate less rather than more background knowledge among the audience.

2 Overview of the Structure of a Presentation

The following sections give an overview of each component in a presentation. Although each presentation should follow this guideline, you will find that not all sections are (equally) applicable for each presentation. Identify the sections that are relevant to your presentation and work through them.

2.1 Title Page

Give the title of your presentation and your names. The title does not need to be the same as the title of the paper that is at the heart of your presentation. If you present a paper, make sure you give the full reference of the paper you present (see “Manual of Style”)

2.2 Table of Contents/Agenda

Give an overview of the main sections of your presentation to show the others what you are covering and where you are going. You do not need to spend a lot of time on this; just make sure you give a rough outline of the presentation.

2.3 First Part/General Review

In this section, you outline the broader topic of your presentation by linking it up to the chapter/papers that the other students have read or to what they know already. Don't get lost in detail here. You need to paint the big picture broad-brush.

Note that this is a good place for interactive elements. First, you can try and get the audience to develop the main points with you. Second, if suitable, you can, for example, adapt an/the experiment from the research paper you present and do it in class. This way, your audience will get a feel for what the experiments are like and will grasp much better what your presentation is about.

Typically, this part should not exceed five slides (excluding potential experiments). At the end, you have one slide with a brief summary of the main points.

2.4 Research Question

Next, you present the research question of the experiment(s) you present in the following. If there are several questions or issues, condense them into one or two questions on one slide. If you present on a broader topic or a more general phenomenon, define the topic and specify the scope of the phenomenon you present.

2.5 Paper: Previous Research

At this point, you delve into the paper(s) you present. If necessary, you can briefly present the findings from previous research that the author(s) bring up. Keep this to a minimum, though.

2.6 Paper: Phenomenon

You clearly outline the phenomena that are studied in the paper(s) (e.g., a particular grammatical structure or a psycholinguistic phenomenon). Make sure you explain this in sufficient detail and you use lots of examples. It is essential your audience understands the phenomena.

2.7 Hypothesis

For experimental papers, you give and explain the hypothesis/hypotheses the paper pursues. If there are several hypotheses, order them according to the sequence of experiments/findings or the order in which you talk about them.

2.8 Overview of data/experiment(s)

On one slide, present an overview of how you will present the data or experiments. Typically, you have a slide stating the order in which you present (i) participants, (ii) materials, (iii) procedure, and (iv) results for experimental papers (see below).

PARTICIPANTS

Give information about participants (one slide max.)

MATERIALS

Give all relevant materials, including examples, and state how many items there were for each participant. You do not need to present all aspects: for example, how many lists there were, etc.

PROCEDURE

Explain the procedure. Sometimes it is useful to illustrate the experimental procedure in an in-class experiment.

For corpus studies, overview papers or other types of research, follow the order in which the data/findings are presented in the paper(s) you present.

2.9 Results

In this section, you present the results/data in a step-by-step fashion. Make sure you include some figures, graphs and tables. In general, a visualization is preferable over a table. For each figure, graph or table, explain methodically what they show and how they show it. You do NOT need to present the statistical analyses. Include mention of statistical comparisons only if it is necessary – for example, in cases where differences are small, though significant, or seem large, but are not significant. Refer to the “Manual of Style” for advice on how to present statistics.

2.10 Summary of Results

On one slide, summarize the most important results.

[If there is more than one experiment in the paper you present, you go back to 2.7 for each individual experiment.]

2.11 Link of the Results to the Hypothesis

At this point, you relate the findings/data to the hypothesis and the research question. It may be useful to restate the hypothesis/research question on the slide and indicate whether and how the results/data confirm or disconfirm the hypothesis.

2.12 Conclusions of the Authors

Now you report briefly the conclusions the authors made in the paper. Concentrate on what is relevant to the research question (2.4). Do not try to put in all discussions, speculations and suggestions for further research you find in the paper.

2.13 Summary and putting in context

You then relate the study you have presented to the larger topic at issue (2.3). Try to come back to some of the points from section III and show how the study ties in with them.

2.14 Your Criticisms and Ideas

Since no study is perfect, this is where you raise some critical points or present some of your own ideas about the study, the broader issue or what you think should be done next.

2.15 Questions

At the end, you select a couple of questions from the questions submitted by your fellow-students in the forum for discussion. Ideally, these are open-ended questions that relate to the study or the broader topic. They should lend themselves to group discussion.

2.16 References

List all references you used in the presentation according to the “Manual of Style”.

3 Handout

Every presentation needs to be accompanied by a printed handout. A handout is NOT just a print-off of your slides. You prepare a separate handout that supplements your presentation. It contains the most important (definitions of) terms, examples, figures and graphs, data, summaries and references. The purpose of a handout is for your audience to follow your presentation and take notes. Make sure you leave enough room in the margins for notes.

Typically, a handout is around 2 A4 pages and max 4 A4 pages. Preferably, you use bullet points rather than full sentences.

The handout has a title page with your names, the course details and the title of your presentation. Make sure you list all references of the texts/sources to which you refer at the end of the handout.

4 Final Words of Advice

Finally, you should go through your presentation again and bear in mind the following issues: At any point during your presentation, the audience should know (a) where you are in your presentation and (b) why what you are saying is relevant. First, this means that you need to be methodical in the organization of your presentation by giving pointers as to where you are. Second, you need to leave out irrelevant details that confuse or bowl over your audience. Remember, you want the others to get the main message!

Once you are happy with your presentation, all you need to do is ... REHEARSE, REHEARSE and REHEARSE!

Good luck!

Some technical things to consider:

- If you have animations, check and double-check that they work.
- Make sure you do not have animations where you do not want them: It is annoying if you have things flying in from left, right and bottom on every slide.

- If you embed video or audio clips, make sure they work on the computer on which you run the presentation. When sending your presentation by e-mail, make sure you include all files.
- Remember that projectors often render colours inaccurately: If you need accurate colours, check the projector in the room before.
- Make sure everybody in your presentation group knows how to go one slide forward and back, etc. Standing in front of class is not the ideal time for learning how to do PowerPoint!