

GUIDELINES & TIPS FOR PRESENTATIONS

IMPORTANT - Read This Section!!

Before you start to prepare your PowerPoint presentation, read this entire document. Then, once you think you're done with assembling the presentation, read this document again. Be sure to practice your talk before you give it to the class. If you find, during practice, that it is consistently too short or too long, this is a sign that you should fix something (add or cut material and/or change your speed).

Each group member must deliver an equal portion of the oral presentation.

Organization of the Presentation

Title slide:

- Informative, but brief title.
- Group members' names.
- Institution (Biology Department, WWU).
- You may want a nice photo related to your presentation as a backdrop to all of the above, but keep it visually simple so that it adds rather than detracts from the text.
- Usually there is no need to read the title to the audience – they can read it.

Introduction:

- Establish the big picture context into which fits the topic you are discussing. You may find that it will help to discuss relevant ideas and examples from the textbook, to illustrate why the topic is interesting and important.
- Avoid slides with a lot of text – use bulleted statements to develop the context. Limit each slide to 3-4 points - any more than that and you will lose the attention of your audience.
- Show some nice photographs or schematic drawings (or informative graphs) of your topic to help your audience connect to the "issue" or question. You can also show data from background literature if the data are particularly relevant to the topic you are developing.

Evidence:

- Present figures (graphs) that illustrate the evidence for the main conclusions. If necessary, you can use a table, but a figure is almost always better for oral presentations. For your first presentation (on the *Beak of the Finch* readings), you should look up the original papers and get figures from them. Similarly, you will probably want to find figures from the papers that are discussed in *Icons of Evolution*, as well as papers from papers discussed in rebuttals, for your second presentation.
- Walk your audience through any figures: describe the axes, point out patterns, and significant treatment effects.
- End with brief summary slide of the main evidence.

Discussion:

- Discuss why the evidence is sound and interesting (convince the audience!).
- Mention any caveats about the work - areas in which it could be improved or expanded.
- Talk about future directions this research could take.
- Finish with a statement of your overall conclusions (a conclusions slide is generally effective).

Layout and Design

- Construct all slides in "landscape" orientation. If an image is inherently vertical, shrink it so that it fits horizontally.
- Try to keep the important information away from the margins of the slide area, especially the bottom 10%. Often, the bottoms of slides cannot be seen by people in the back rows of a room because heads are in the way.
- Use a consistent color scheme for the slide background, which is not overly complicated. Busy graphics tend to detract from the text and even more so from figures/tables.
- If your slide design has background images, you should remove the background image anytime you want the audience to focus on something other than text (i.e. a picture, figure or table). This can be done by right-clicking the slide, choose background, and then click the box that says "omit background image."
- Alternatively if you have a slide with only a photograph or figure (no text), set the background of that slide to black or the color that is the basis for your other slides.
- Choose your fonts carefully -- not all appear "smoothed" when projected. Always avoid fonts with city names (e.g., New York); these fonts are not reliably smoothed in many applications. Non-serif fonts (e.g., Helvetica) are slightly more readable on the screen than serif fonts (e.g., Palatino).
- Do not use more than 2 or 3 fonts in a presentation.
- Your audience will read 100% of the text on a slide, so delete any text that is not essential (i.e., use short, bulleted phrases, not long complicated sentences)
- Minimize your use of abbreviations, or avoid them altogether. Always define an abbreviation the first time you use it.
- Use italics instead of underlining.
- Avoid using strings of all capital letters in slide titles (or elsewhere). Strings of all capitals are very difficult to read quickly, and are usually interpreted as the print equivalent of YELLING!
- Do not use transition fades, bouncing text, or swooshing noises. Even though most audiences will politely chuckle, rest assured that inside they are cringing with pity and horror. It is ok, though, to have each bulleted item in a list 'appear' via animation, but keep it simple.
- Avoid, if possible, mixing green and red on a figure--members of your audience may be red/green colorblind, the most common type of colorblindness.
- Use arrows to direct the audience's attention to particular parts of figures.
- For figures created in Excel or other graphing programs and then exported to PowerPoint, make sure that the output fonts and line widths are legible once the image is scaled within PowerPoint (thin lines and small fonts often don't show up well).

Delivery of Presentation

- Do not rely on your notes: the room may be too dark, and reading your notes will give the impression that you are unprepared.
- As you speak, look at your audience (not your slides) as much as possible.
- Imagine yourself talking to someone at the back of the room. That will ensure that you are projecting your voice adequately.
- Do not keep "checking" to see whether a slide is still there. It almost invariably is.
- Similarly, do not simply "read" your slides to your audience, because your audience can read them. Use a minimum amount of text on your slides, and expand upon the text that is shown (i.e. explain the bulleted statements). This will also keep the font size large enough so that your audience can see it easily.
- When verbally referring to a specific portion of a slide, use a pointer to briefly orient the audience.
- When you are not actively using the pointer, do not distract the audience by playing with it.
- Do not chew gum, fiddle with your jewelry, or wear a hat, even if these things comfort you.

- Do not put your hands in your pockets. If you are likely to forget, fill your pockets with pushpins beforehand.
- Do not draw more attention to bad slides by apologizing for them!
- Resist puns, obvious jokes, and overly rehearsed humor. Some use of humor is ok, but strive to give a professional talk.
- Minimize your use of crutches, "OK," "like," "um," "er," "sort of," "ya know," and "kind of." Especially "like." It's sort of like, ya know, when you use lots of filler words, it's, like, people totally don't even listen to you anymore. Bored audience members have been known to actually record the number of "likes" in talks.
- Adjust your speed or ask whether there are any questions, if you notice confused looks.
- If people are falling asleep, it is a sign that you are boring them. Speak up and become more dynamic, without getting carried away.
- When responding to questioners with faint voices, repeat the question loudly for the benefit of all.
- If you are unsure of the answer to a question, say so, but then give it your best try (unless you really have absolutely no guess as to how to answer the question).
- Before giving your presentation, ensure that it will run (and that none of the fonts or symbols are changed or images lost) on a Windows machine. Do this before the last minute!

adapted from <http://www.swarthmore.edu/NatSci/cpurrrin1/powerpointadvice.htm>, by Colin Purrington (2005)