



During your college career, you may be asked to present your academic work in the classroom, at conferences, or at special events. Two types of talks are common in academia: presentations in the classroom (including Honors Thesis presentations) and conference presentations. Both formats can be challenging because they may require you to condense a much longer paper into a 15 to 20 minute presentation. However, learning to present your work is an important academic exercise because it allows you to share your research, ideas, and arguments with a wider audience. It also invites critical engagement with your work, which in turn enables you to improve your writing and thinking. Because many presentations include visual elements (e.g. Power Point), this handout offers guidelines for converting a written paper into a talk and creating visual material that is appropriate for your topic.

General tips

Many classes in college require a lengthy research paper, and you may be asked to present your research to your classmates before you have to turn in your final paper. This is a great opportunity to receive feedback and to polish your argument for the final submission. However, the following question usually arises: How do I summarize a 10 to 15-page paper for a 15 to 20-minute talk? Below are some tips and guidelines to help you through this process.

Types of Delivery

Typically, there are two ways of presenting: you are either using notes to guide you through your presentation, or you read your paper.

- **TALKING WITH NOTES:** This can be tricky, as you may find yourself expanding on certain points more than others, along with losing track of the order of your argument. It is imperative that you create a document that clearly and equally divides your introduction and thesis, your main points of evidence, and your conclusion. The only way to avoid going over time (and/or losing track of the order of your argument) is to practice your talk. Moreover, it means that you will have to pick major points instead of incorporating everything you have written.

- **READING THE PAPER:** It takes about 2 to 2.5 minutes to read one page (double-spaced, 12 point font), so if you plan to read your paper out loud, then it should take no longer to read it than the maximum time allotted. (For example, for a 15 minute presentation, your paper should be approximately 6 pages long).

This paper is to be heard, not read!

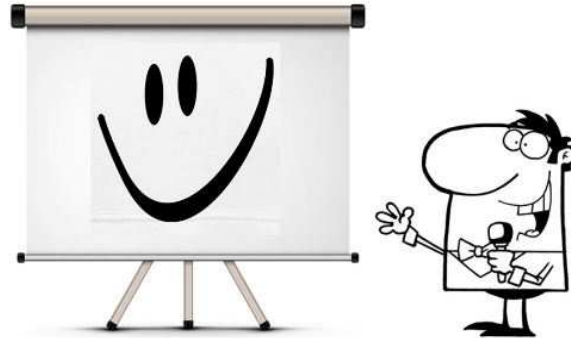
- When you are preparing your draft for the presentation, keep in mind that your audience will rely on *listening comprehension*, not reading comprehension. That means that your ideas need to be clear and to the point, and organized in a way that makes it possible for your audience to follow you. Remember to do the following:
 - Introduce yourself (unless you have already been introduced)
 - State your thesis clearly
 - Tell your audience why this topic is relevant
 - Make sure you tell your audience what awaits them. Give them a roadmap of the talk, even if it seems redundant to you. (For example: “First I will first consider AAA and its relation to HHH, and then I will move on to UUU. I will conclude my discussion with JJJ and GGG.”)
- While you may have incorporated a lot of quotes in your paper, it is much more difficult to cite other scholars in a presentation. If possible, try to use your own words. When a quotation is necessary to make your point, use a signal phrase to introduce the source to your audience. For example, you can say: “As theorist Sandra Somebody states...” or “Theorist Sandra Somebody has argued that...”
 - If you want to convey a general opinion people in a scholarly field share—and especially if you want to point out your scholarly intervention—it is important to let your audience know that you understand the central argument the other scholars are making before stating your own position. One way to address this kind of situation is the following: “Scholars agree that ZZZ causes FFF. However, I propose that...”
- Don’t forget about the conclusion. Your audience has just listened to many of your arguments and observations, but they may have already forgotten some of them. Make sure to remind them *how* you came to your conclusion and why your scholarly intervention and analysis matter.
 - For example, you can start your conclusion by stating: “As my presentation today has shown, SSSS’s relationship to HHH is contingent on # factors (a,b,c). By way of conclusion, I would like to argue that... (summarize your main points and give your conclusion).”

Incorporating SLIDES/VISUAL material

Depending on your field of study or the nature of the conference, you will need to show some visual and textual material during your presentation.

- A successful visual presentation should be in sync with the spoken part of your presentation. You can coordinate your talking/reading points with your visual presentation by marking your paper whenever you will show a next slide. There are countless ways to do so, but here is one example:
 - “ZZZ stands in close to relation to HHH. (**SLIDE**) As a study from 2008 has shown...”

- Make sure that you address the visual material on the screen. Do not assume that the audience will “get it.” Many people may still be thinking about your previous point and need your direction to understanding the relevance of the visuals you are showing. Pointing out what your listeners are looking at allows them to follow your argument, and perhaps, even better understand it!
- When you have important points to share, it can be helpful to put text on the slides. Because your audience is listening to you, and also reading, try to keep the written part short. Reading all your points from the slides can be tedious for your audience, so short summaries (approximately 2-5 words) may work best. Too much text overwhelms your listeners.



- If your slides include writing, make sure the font size is large enough and that the color of the font works well with the background. Legibility is key.
- SPELL CHECK! It is very easy to overlook typos when you integrate visuals, but the audience members can see them. A typo can undermine your whole professional demeanor. Be sure to proofread.
- Give your audience time to look at the slide. Do not hastily move on. You may have looked at your slides many times, but your audience needs time to absorb them and understand why each slide is relevant.
- Be selective when you choose your images/visuals/graphs. Ask yourself: does this visual demonstrate my argument? How does it relate to my point?
- **Overall appearance of the visual presentation**
 - Keep it simple. While it is nice to have engaging visual graphics in the background of your slides, they can be distracting. Make sure that whatever theme you pick actually works with the material you are presenting. Sometimes less is more.
 - Be visually consistent. If you put titles below graphs/visuals for example, then make sure you do it the same way for every slide. It shows professionalism and care for your presentation.
 - Use high quality images. Sometimes it is easiest to find images online to use for presentations. However, the quality varies dramatically, and sometimes you may need to scan images in order to retain a professional look. It is therefore important to begin preparing your presentation well in advance and avoid last minute additions of low-resolution images.

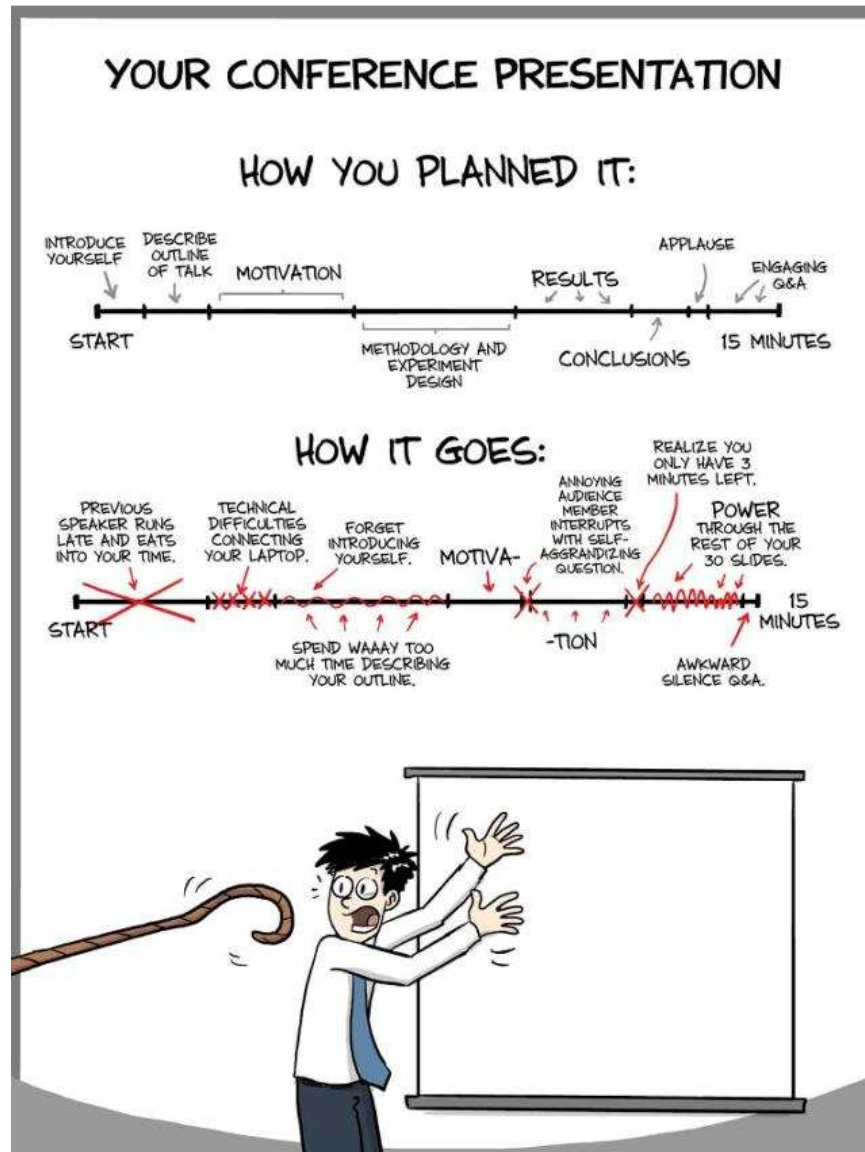
Practice Makes Perfect

- The most important thing to do is to practice your talk. The exercise of reading the paper out loud will help you find mistakes in your draft, such as misspellings and unfinished sentences, and it will help you judge the general flow and coherence. If you are not reading a paper, make sure you know your points, and their order, well.
- Practicing your presentation will make you more confident, as you will become intimately familiar with the major terms you are using and your own writing and thinking style.
- The more you practice, the easier it will be to look up at your audience, showing them that you care about having their attention. The more engaged an audience member is, the more successful your presentation will be.
- Do not go over your allotted time. Practicing your talk is the only way you can make sure you remain within the time you are given. Time yourself. Try to make it a minute shorter than your allotted time! No matter how interesting and important extra material seems to you, the audience members, and especially the organizers, do not want to listen to more than they need to. Most likely, other scholars are giving papers right after you, and you do not want to appear as if you think your work deserves more time. People usually do not complain about presentations being “too short.”
- *GROUP PRESENTATIONS*: If you are presenting with a colleague, practicing and designing the talk together will ensure that you are on the same page with your co-presenter. The combination of your parts should be seamless and consistent.
- You may want to change the font size of your printed paper or notes to at least 14 point. Sometimes rooms are not well lit, which makes it difficult to read.

The Culture of Conference Papers

Conferences are great opportunities to network, learn from others, and present your work to other academic professionals and intellectuals. This can be an intimidating task, but as with any challenge, preparation makes it easier. Here are a few additional tips on how to present your work—and yourself—in this social context.

- When you communicate via email with an organizer of a panel or the organizers of your Honors Thesis presentation, make sure to be prompt, precise, and professional in your correspondences. If they ask for a draft of your paper two weeks before the presentation, make sure you can deliver it (or tell them in advance if you cannot meet the deadline). If you exhibit respectful and responsible behavior during your dealings with the organizers, they will most likely return that kind of behavior.



Don't let your presentation go like this!

(<http://www.phdcomics.com/comics.php>)

- When you are at a conference, exhibit confidence and excitement, and stay close to your group of presenters in the front. Make sure to introduce yourself to the chair(s) of the session, and be ready to meet and greet a lot of people who may ask you the same questions over and over again.
- Avoid unnecessary delays. Have your presentation printed (or on an iPad or other device) and your digital file ready. Do not wait until the last minute to finish your visual presentation, and make sure your file is not corrupted or too large to be played. Conferences are very time sensitive and technical difficulties occur regularly, so you do not want to add any extra stress to the organizers of your panel.
- Dress the part. Depending on the conference you are attending, the dress code may vary significantly. Try to dress appropriately and in a way that will make you feel comfortable as well as professional. This will give you more confidence.

- **Q&A:** For many scholars, this is the most terrifying part of the presentation. What if you do not know the answer to a question?
 - Chances are, you know the answer. You have prepared this talk, you have done your research, and you have been chosen to present.
 - Sometimes someone may ask you a very complicated (and perhaps even obscure) question. At times, it is helpful to “reiterate” what they are asking – (“Am I understanding correctly – you are asking such and such?”) That can “buy” you some time to think, and it may entice the audience member to be more to the point.
 - Remember that you cannot know EVERYTHING. And that is completely fine. You are at the conference to share what you know and also learn from others.
 - Here too, confidence comes with practice. Try to find colleagues or friends who are willing to listen to your presentation. Let them ask you questions before you deliver your presentation at a conference. This exercise will indicate what may be unclear to audience members and what questions you should anticipate being asked.

Last Tip:

Remember that many people get nervous before a talk, even those who have done it many times. Some things may be out of your control. Try to have fun no matter what!

Other Resources

Mike Dahlin, *Giving a Conference Talk*

<http://www.cs.utexas.edu/~dahlin/professional/goodTalk.pdf>

Claremont Graduate Center Writing Center, *Presenting Conference Papers in the Humanities*

<http://www.cgu.edu/pages/864.asp>

Columbia University Graduate School of Arts & Sciences Teaching Center, *How to Give Highly Effective Lectures—and Job Talks and Conference Presentation*

<http://www.columbia.edu/cu/tat/pdfs/presentations1.pdf>

Matthew O. Jackson, *Notes on Presenting a Paper*

<http://www.stanford.edu/~jacksonm/present.pdf>