



GUIDELINES FOR SPEAKERS / ABSTRACT PRESENTERS & SESSION CHAIRS

To help you make your presentation interesting and informative -- a worthy use of your auditors' time -- we have prepared the suggestions below for your consideration.

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GUIDELINES FOR SPEAKERS / ABSTRACT PRESENTERS

To help you make your presentation interesting and informative -- a worthy use of your auditors' time -- we have prepared the suggestions below for your consideration.

Preparation and Rehearsal

Prior to the delivery of the presentation, practice in front of a live audience of colleagues or friends and note the time taken. The actual delivery of the talk will often take longer than it did in the rehearsal. Remember that PowerPoint slides or overheads add seconds to the talk. The average 8.5 x 11 inch page, typed, double spaced with one-inch margins, contains about 250 words. The average speaker can present approximately 6 of these pages in 12 minutes. Have text that is highly legible (double spacing helps) with well-marked cues for visuals; number the pages so that sequence can be maintained. Keep your notes handy but don't read them!!!

Time Management

Ask the session chair or a friend to give you time signals; legitimize that function. Monitor time carefully; if you exceed your allotted time you are, in effect, saying that your remarks are more important than those who follow. Decide in advance what to omit if at risk of exceeding your time.

Speaking and Gestures

Verify good microphone placement and volume setting. Keep your voice level up, speak clearly and not too fast. Avoid letting your voice drop at the end of sentences or paragraphs. Use active words and short sentences. Words should reinforce visual material. Do not read your talk!!! Keep your hands away from your mouth so that people who speech read can understand you. Use hand motions for emphasis but don't let them get too exuberant. Make eye contact with different parts of the audience; don't stare off into the distance, at the projection screen or your paper. Keep in mind that your audience's interest in your topic will mirror that of your own; if you look bored, disinterested, apologetic, etc., your audience will probably share your apparent affect.

Your Message

Start by acquainting your audience with the nature and purpose of the research but keep this introduction short. Don't start by discounting or minimizing your knowledge about the overall subject lest the audience wonder why they are listening to you. Trim acknowledgments to a minimum. Time spent on detailing the inputs of colleagues, usually unknown to the audience, is time taken from your presentation. Put acknowledgments at the end if possible. Trim the 'methods section;' provide only enough details to assure the audience of the validity of your findings. Define or clarify acronyms; repeat definitions occasionally to refresh audience memory. Give emphasis to your take-home-message, the only part that has sustained value! What do you want your audience to remember; all else is secondary. Consider summarizing the major points at both the beginning and end of your presentation.

Question and Discussion Time

Avoid long replies to questions and expand only as necessary. Before replying, repeat the question for the benefit of the audience and to verify that you understand it. It is OK to acknowledge limited knowledge to specific questions. Do not let a questioner digress, ruminate, rant, politicize or make a speech; politely bring a discursive 'question' to a close.

Regarding PowerPoint Slides

- Try to keep to the rule of no more than six lines and six words per line; avoid using long sentences or paragraphs; best to use bullet points;
- Always have light colors against a dark background or vice versa;
- Avoid small fonts (i.e., below 20-point) on your PowerPoint slides. Minimize all CAPS or bright red text; these 'shout' to the audience;
- Do not use red lines on a dark background; though nice on a computer screen they are near invisible when projected;
- Make graphics self-explanatory with good and complete legends. A good graphic should require no verbal interpretation. Highlight with different colors significant findings and use a laser pointer;
- Use photos judiciously and keep them relevant to your talk;
- Avoid 'cute' slide backgrounds and transitions; these can be annoying distractions from your central message;
- Consider 1-2 slides per minute for those that have text or graphic content, and perhaps up to 3-4 per minute for photos;
- When using a laser pointer do not keep it on the screen wandering around; point to the desired target and turn it off;
- Do not read your slides unless it is a quote or for added emphasis; the audience will have finished reading the text by the time you are on the 2nd line. Use your remarks to expand on, paraphrase, or provide examples to what your slide is saying; keep them relevant to what is on the slide;
- Avoid 'busy' slides that the audience can't read, much less, comprehend. As an exception you may want to show a questionnaire or table as it looked in its original form. In this case don't read out the details. Instead, use a pointer to indicate which numbers or column(s) are significant and then transition to a cropped or edited slide that displays the information of interest;
- Provide contact information on last slide along with credits and acknowledgments.

Have a good time with your presentation and make it a valuable use of your audience's time!

GUIDELINES FOR SESSION CHAIRS

A good chair can do much to make a session go smoothly by keeping it on track, the audience engaged, and the speakers on target. We hope you find these suggestions useful.

In Advance of the Session

If the session is based on related topics, call the speakers well in advance, preferably by conference call, to make sure they understand how their presentations fit into the theme; duplicative, overlapping presentations, at times with using the same slides, are a real turn-off. Confirm amount of presentation and Q&A time available.

Immediately Before the Session

Meet with speakers to review the 'game rules,' confirm agreed speaking and Q&A times, and to inform them about time advisories. If time is limited consider asking the audience to hold all questions (except as necessary for definitions, clarification of concepts, etc.) until the end of the presentations. Confirm speaker sequence which should be as given in the program. Ask speakers to use the microphone and to repeat questions during the Q&A period. Remind them that they must verbally disclose any financial support or conflicts of interests. Position yourself next to the podium or have a time-keeper sit in the first row in front of the speakers. Consider having a silent timer visible to the speaker that will make a sound at the end of the allotted time; it is impersonal and the audience will know the time is up. Familiarize yourself with lighting adjustments and check the microphone position, speaker volume and handheld microphone if available. Become familiar with the projection equipment and how to select pre-loaded PowerPoint presentations.

Starting the Session

Start on time; delays are a disservice to those present and cut presentation time. Provide brief overview to session objectives and tell audience whether Q&As will be allowed after each speaker or held to the end of the presentations. Introduce each speaker with a brief 3-4 sentence introduction covering only the most salient biodata. Obtain in advance if possible copies of speakers' papers and resumes to prepare for appropriate introductions. Avoid reading long introductions stretching back to training days and include unique, public interest tidbits if available. Invite speakers to provide additional information; they know their background much better than you.

During a presentation

Give speakers 5-, 3-, and 1-minute warnings. If falling behind schedule shorten your introductions to subsequent speakers and ask them to supplement your comments as appropriate; they can do it faster, more accurately, and they won't be long-winded since it cuts into their presentation time. Consider holding questions for the end of presentation. If there is a mid-session break start rounding up the audience several minutes before renewing the session. If you are also speaking, take the last slot; it will give you an additional incentive to keep others on time.

Potential problems

Don't let speakers go significantly overtime which will reduce time available for subsequent speakers. During the Q&A portion be ready to intervene if either a questioner or speaker becomes long-winded or if a questioner starts making a speech or becomes polemic; politely insist they voice their question.

Concluding the session

End promptly, expressing thanks to the speakers and audience. If room is not followed by another session invite the speakers to remain for a short time for further Q/A.

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