

Presentations

- Videos of previous third year presentations are available - course is the 'Sociology project'.
- Outline problem and topic being discussed, argument/topic.
- Discuss what problems you felt there were with the literature and topic. What you learned from it.
- What are your conclusions what did you think about the presentation question or topic?
- What future research is implied by what you read or researched?

Presentation

- Use the time well – don't overrun, don't end early, give sufficient time to all the above points, don't run out of time for some and spend too much time on others.
- Have a clear structure and explain clearly in an accessible way.
- Use visual aids, e.g. overheads, handouts, list of main points, tables/diagrams, video, music, pictures, etc, but not all of these, you only have a few minutes, and don't use unnecessary visuals! Use these to illustrate, explain, guide and involve the audience. Ohds should be bold, large font and visible and not contain so much information that reading it distracts from your talk or is too much to read.
- Be lively, engage the audience, keep eye contact, don't look at notes all the time, change pace.
- Try to speak direct to the audience rather than reading a text – use notes only for headings and to glance at occasionally to remind you where you are going.

Some Notes adapted from the Sussex Social Psychology Department

GENERAL COMMENTS

Giving formal presentations is probably the skill learned or refined at university which will be of most benefit to students once they have graduated. It is also potentially one of the most fulfilling learning activities.

These notes are intended to provide an indication of the component parts of effective formal presentations (although they may be of some use when planning other forms of communication, e.g. essays, debates, role plays, etc.). Even for formal presentations, the notes are not intended to be definitive, but are rather intended only for guidance purposes.

Good formal presentations necessarily involve *exposition* (presenting facts or literature), and *analysis* (presenting arguments and/or interpretations), and *communication* (presenting effectively).

ESSENTIAL COMPONENTS

Exposition

It is up to you what proportion of your presentation consists of exposition. Clearly some will be essential, as even when you are presenting your own arguments you will need to set them in their context and show their relevance to current debate.

If you wish your presentation to consist primarily of exposition, make sure that you: (i) do not merely repeat material contained in the lectures and/or the essential reading (you should assume such knowledge on the part of your audience: your job is to tell the audience something they are likely not to know); and, (ii) incorporate an *analysis* of the facts you are presenting.

Try to present your material using your own structure tailored specifically to the task at hand: do not simply copy the structure of one of the authors whose material you have read (or, if you must use someone else's structure, notify the audience of this to avoid plagiarism). Organise the material by themes or issues: do not simply summarise a number of papers in the order you read them.

As long as you have clearly made an effort, do not be afraid to say that you do not understand something - your lack of understanding may well be a clue that there is weakness in the material that troubles you. However, try to be as clear as possible about why you do not understand/what it is that troubles you.

Analysis

The quality of any analysis included is perhaps the single factor which best distinguishes between good and bad presentations (followed by the quality of communication). *Interpreting, criticising, arguing, evaluating, synthesising, summarising, concluding*, and exploring *implications* are all forms of analysis. Evaluation is the most important. It may well be that X said x and Y found y, but are either or both of their analyses convincing? Why? Are they based on acceptable data and argument? Are they compatible? If not, which should be amended or abandoned? Why? What is the importance and what are the implications of accepting or rejecting either or both statements? Etc..

It is crucial to remember that analysis needs to be *justified* (e.g. via empirical evidence, facts, rules of logic, argument, theory, etc.) to be convincing to the audience (the "jury"). In particular, "I think..." statements need to be backed up with *why* you think such and such, and, more importantly, why your *audience* should think the same way as you do.

Communication

You may have all the facts in the world within your head, and possess keen analytical skills, but unless you can communicate effectively with (i.e. teach and/or persuade) the audience, you will have failed to do yourself justice. The comments and the "*Presentation Evaluation Sheet*" below indicate the sorts of factors you need to consider in order to maximise the effectiveness of your communication.

STRUCTURE AND CONTENT

Other than in exceptional circumstances (eg a very short presentation), your presentation could be structured so as to have a "beginning" (i.e. an introduction), and "middle" (i.e. a development), and an "end" (i.e. a conclusion). Indeed, sub-sections (e.g. introduction) and even paragraphs could have the same structure (i.e. a beginning, middle, and end).

Introduction

In the *Introduction* to your presentation you ideally need to introduce both the topic of the presentation and the argument you are to make/the conclusion you are to reach.

As with the presentation as a whole, the introduction must be well structured. The following is ONE possibility: introduction of the structure/content of your presentation; introduction of problem/task (often given by the title); introduction of key position(s), thinker(s), theory(-ies), etc.; introduction of main criticisms (or types of criticisms), qualifications, problems, etc. with one or more of the aforementioned theories, etc.; indication of empirical evidence (and quality of that evidence) for various positions; introduction of conclusion to be reached; indication of any qualifications or caveats to and/or implications of that conclusion. If the presentation is a short one some of this detail may be best left out for the middle.

Development

The main body of your presentation is concerned with taking the audience from your *Introduction* to your *Conclusion* in the most clear, focused, linear, persuasive, and entrancing way possible. How this will be done will be specific to you and the topic. The following is ONE possibility: each theory (or whatever) is described, evaluated, and "judged" in turn, with a "final verdict" being reached (or reiterated) in the *Conclusion*. Such a "final verdict" might be that one theory (or whatever) is clearly superior to the others, but has certain identifiable weaknesses; or that it is impossible to choose between certain competing theories, although others are clearly untenable; or that a "hybrid" theory is needed with certain parts from several theories being moulded together into a new theory; or whatever. Whatever the verdict, the *justification* for it must come in the development part of the presentation.

Make sure that any material presented is *relevant* to and *focused* upon both the title of your presentation and the point you are trying to make at the time. Try to ensure an adequate *breadth of reading* (i.e. enough to make your case and to show that you have encountered and considered contrary evidence). It is not possible to say exactly how much reading you should have done, but it should certainly be evidently more than the essential reading (which everyone present should have read) and your lecture notes. An adequate *depth of reading* will accompany or follow from an adequate analysis. Breadth, depth, relevance, and analysis of material will all contribute to an adequate *use of evidence*.

Conclusion

The *Conclusion* has several components. The first, but *not* the only one, is to *summarise* and/or *synthesise* the main points made and/or conclusions reached in the main body of your presentation (i.e. during the *Development*), possibly with an accompanying summary of the main reasons for (i.e. *justification* of) those points/conclusions.

Another important function of the *Conclusion* is to explore the *importance* and/or *relevance* of the points made/conclusions reached for the theories (etc.) mentioned in the *Introduction*. For example, do the points support, destroy, or indicate necessary amendments to such theories?

Thirdly, are there other *implications* of your conclusions, e.g. for future research, for Governmental policy, or whatever?

Finally, how confident should one be of your conclusions? Are there any *qualifications* or *caveats*? Are there any important possible *objections* to your conclusions and, if so, how might you meet those objections?

Discussion

A big part of the skill involved in giving a presentation is managing the interaction with the audience after your monologue finishes. Indeed, part of your assessment is determined by how well you respond to questions and requests, and how well you are able to act as a facilitator of the discussion which follows your talk.

Try to anticipate likely questions (especially "hard" ones). Practising your presentation in advance in front of an audience will help.

If someone asks you a question you cannot immediately answer do not panic. Be truthful. Say that you need a little time to think and that you will get back to them later. Alternatively, admit you do not know and (if it is genuinely an interesting and relevant question) ask the audience if anyone else could answer it. In order to facilitate open discussion after the "any questions" part of your presentation, it is useful to have a list of "*discussion points*", "*issues to explore*", etc. At least the main two such issues should be included on your handout. Try to make sure that these discussion points do not require too much prior knowledge (other than contained in the lecture and/or the essential reading). Also avoid making them so vague as to make discussion very difficult or so specific as to halt rather than trigger discussion. Ideally, they should be interesting and attractive enough that the audience will be eager to discuss them, in which case your job will simply be to try and keep the discussion relevant and make sure that everyone who wants to speak gets the chance. There is nothing wrong, if things are going well, with you saying no more, and perhaps a little less, than everyone else at this stage.

If there are questions which the class cannot satisfactorily answer and/or if there are issues or debates which the class cannot reach agreement on, note such things and towards the end of the discussion section there is nothing wrong with asking the tutor for their opinion on these matters. However, unless and until the tutor insists on taking charge, try to carry out the bulk of the discussion section either: (i) treating the tutor as an equal status member of the discussion group (to be shut up as necessary by the presenter/chair); or, (ii) ignoring the tutor altogether.

PRESENTATION SKILLS

Delivery

If at all possible, avoid reading your presentation from verbatim notes. Instead, use flash-cards, headings, keywords, your own visual aids, etc..

Position yourself so that the majority of the audience can see you easily, and so that you can see them. Try to make eye-contact with as many of your audience as possible (remembering that the tutor is only one member of that audience). Speak as clearly as you can, loud enough for all to hear without straining, but not so loud as to scare anyone!

For your communication to be most effective you need to *interest* your audience. To do this you need to be *original* and/or *creative* (i.e. present material, arguments, interpretations, conclusions, etc. that your audience are not familiar with) and thereby *educate* your audience. Ideally, you would also like your audience to *enjoy* your presentation (so jokes, interesting visual and other aids, etc. might help), but remember that entertaining your audience is a means to an (educative and/or persuasive) end, not an end in itself.

Fluency/pace

The more fluent and well paced a presentation, the more favourable the audience will feel toward the presenter and the more attentive they will be to the presentation. Inevitably some people will be more confident than others, and many may feel very nervous indeed. Preparation, practice, and experience will help here. Starting your presentation with an overview, using headings and sub-headings shown on an OHP slide, will get you started, and many people find that once their presentation is underway their nerves disappear. Speak at your natural pace, but if you speak quickly it may be worth putting the same point in more than one way. Audiences *like* the occasional pause, so do not get too flustered if you need a second or so to think occasionally, or indeed if you lose your train of thought. Stay calm, take your time, and try to keep your composure.

Visual Aids

Very often a presentation can be improved with visual (and other) aids. *Clarity* can be enhanced, for example, with an opening OHP slide showing the structure of the presentation.

Similarly, *comprehension* can be improved if a complicated theory is presented and explained diagrammatically.

Thirdly, an audience's *attention* can often be obtained and maintained by a judicious use of visual and other aids. (But do not sacrifice the essential components of your presentation in order to achieve a multimedia extravaganza.)

If using visual aids, make them as clear, concise, and uncluttered as possible. Make sure there are no spelling mistakes and cite sources used (using the Harvard System).

Handouts

You could produce a 1-2 side A4 handout for everyone in the audience (including the tutor). The handout should be a summary of the salient points of your presentation and should include a short bibliography (using the Harvard System) of the main texts you have referred to in the preparation of your presentation. One purpose of the handout is to enable the audience to listen to what you are saying rather than taking notes. It may help, therefore, to include complicated but important material (definitions, tables, illustrations, etc.) in your handout. Your handout should *not* be a verbatim account of your presentation. A second function of the handout is to give the tutor a "hard" *aide mémoire* of your presentation for marking and other purposes, so make it as attractive as possible, and remember to include identifying information (name, date, title, course).

Length

Your tutor will tell you how long the presentation should be (usually 10-20 minutes) and how long you should allow for questions (usually 5-10 minutes). Keep to the prescribed length. Practice your presentation in advance (ideally in front of an audience). As well as giving you an indication of how long it will last (as long as the real event occurs at the same pace and with the same amount of interruptions and disruptions), practising will make you more confident and less reliant on notes.

"Adventures"

If you are so inclined, if it will add to the quality of your presentation, and if you think it will work, feel free to spice your presentation up with "unusual" activities (e.g. audience participation, role play, games, activities, etc.). Be sure to know what to do should it not prove possible to do what you had planned, or if it does not work quite as you expected. DO NOT do anything which will upset or embarrass any of the audience, and if you do plan anything unusual, check it with your tutor first. Finally, remember that your primary task is to give a presentation and your principal aims are to explain and/or persuade, so make sure that any "added extras" do not turn your presentation into pure performance art.

Collaboration

Sometimes tutors will want or allow you to give team presentations. This opens up a whole host of new and exciting presentational possibilities (e.g. dialogues, debates, etc.) and a whole set of additional problems. It is up to the presenters to divide up preparation duties, but everyone involved must have equal presentation time and unless everyone involved is happy getting the same assessment as everyone else, make sure that the appropriate people are credited for the appropriate work (e.g. during the introduction, on the handout, etc.). Unless presenters are simply going to give sub-presentations in turn, it is usually best to check out your plans with the tutor in advance of the presentation.

AND FINALLY...

It must be reiterated that the above notes are simply *guidelines* and refer explicitly only to *formal* presentations. (Many other guidelines exist, often giving opposing advice to that given here.) In the final analysis, how you give your presentation is entirely up to you.

When you are not presenting yourself, be as considerate and supportive of the person who is as you possibly can. Do the essential reading and have in mind some topics you would like to discuss. Listen attentively. Contribute to the discussion (but do not take it over). Do not interrupt or challenge the presentation (unless the presenter has explicitly invited you to do so): note your concerns and/or questions and mention them (in as nice a way as possible) during the "any questions" section(s) of the presentation and/or during the general discussion. Even where you have legitimate differences of opinion, do not insult or act aggressively toward the presenter or anyone else in the seminar.

If you have any suggestions for how these notes might be made more useful to future students, please let me know.

SOME KEY MARKING CRITERIA

1. *Exposition and Understanding*: Accuracy, focus, and thoroughness. Originality.
2. *Analysis*: Interpretation, evaluation and critique. Conclusions and implications. Use of evidence.
3. *Structure*: Clarity of explanation & development. Introduction (conclusion. Length.
4. *Content*: Appropriate quantity. Answers question. Breadth & relevance of reading.
5. *Discussion*: Promoting & answering questions. Facilitating discussion.
6. *Delivery*: Voice: liveliness, pace & volume. Audience contact. Use of notes.
7. *Materials* (Visual Aids/handout): Clarity, relevance and accuracy.