Presentations

ECON 73010: Research & Writing Seminar I

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Readings and Assignments

Reading:

- For today: Weisbach (2020): Ch. 9; Thompson (2011): Ch. 3; Piazzesi
- For next time: Weisbach (2020): Ch. 10-11; Ellison (2002)

Assignment:

- Revise your research proposal based on feedback from class, partner student, and me
- Identify a potential advisor – email him or her with revised proposal and set up an appointment

The Goal of a Presentation

A presentation should **not** simply be an "oral" version of a paper

A presentation is really an extended **advertisement** of a paper

Fact: most people don't read papers (or at best they skim)

Presenting is really often your one shot at communicating the idea of your paper to others

Different Structures

Seminars: usually 75-90 minutes, audience members have free reign to ask questions

Brownbags: usually 60 minutes, more informal, usually local

Conferences: anywhere from 15-60 minutes, sometimes with a discussant

- In short conference presentations ($\leq$ 20 minutes), norm is usually no questions until after

Different Structures

Cannot use the same presentation slides for department seminars vs. short conference presentations

Can obviously provide more detail in a 90-minute seminar

Short conference presentation: just motivation, research question, main result, and interpretations – gloss over nitty gritty details

Opening

Just like a paper, the opening few minutes is **critical**

Especially today with phones and tablets, people have **short attention spans**

You must **nail** the first few minutes, otherwise people tune you out and start checking their stock portfolios, swipe through EJMR, or doze off

Not a novel – highlight the main result early in introduction of the talk

Time Management

Time will fly

For a seminar or brownbag with active questions, budget for at least one third of the time to be dealing with questions

Useful rule of thumb: $\approx$ 40 or so slides for a 90-minute seminar

Motivation

Like in a paper, you need to **motivate** what you are doing early on in the presentation

Some effective ways to do so:

- Start with a figure that shows some stylized fact you want to explain
- Start with a quote from a policymaker
- Picture or article from periodical
- Reference classic literature: Friedman, Keynes, Samuelson
- Puzzle: highlight an important puzzle, say you are going to make progress on it

Don't Overdo Motivation

A mistake people often make: they spend *too much time* on motivation

Aim for one slide, or two at most, and no more than a couple of minutes

Do not want the motivation to cause the audience to stray from what you are doing

Like in a paper itself – but even more importantly for a presentation – your goal is to get to *what you do* **as quickly as possible**

Research Question

Useful to have a slide titled "Research Question" – just be explicit

Make it **crystal clear** what you are doing

This should come very shortly after the motivation slide – make it the second or third slide

Preview of Results

Useful to have a slide titled "Preview of Results" very early on

Be **crystal clear** what the main results of the paper are

Point these out even if you haven't described *how* you get those results

- Remember, people have short attention spans
- If someone falls asleep after ten minutes, you want them to remember the main point of what you did

Literature and References

Remember, a presentation is not the same as the paper

For most types of papers, best to **avoid** "literature review" slides

Only bring up papers if:

- What you are doing builds on a paper
- What you are doing contrasts with a paper
- What you are doing seems very similar to another well-known paper. Make clear how what you are doing is different and/or better
- What you are doing uses a tool or data set from another paper

Do **not** spend time (or slides) in a presentation citing tons of literature

Paper citations should (almost never) come before you motivate and state your research question

Constructing Slides

Important to have professional, good-looking slides

Beamer or Powerpoint are fine

My rule of thumb: don't try to get cute

- Plain, white background
- Easy to read font that is plenty large
- Don't make the slides a source of distraction

Less is More

Common mistake: too many words on a slide

- *Do as a I say, not as I do*

Slides are a visual aide – just put up what you need people to see

Too many words: people will read those and not listen to you

Everything you plan to say does **not** need to be on the slides

Math and Equations

Remember: **people have short attention spans**

Use **as little math as possible**

You almost certainly need some. But be careful

- Only show what is necessary
- Use clear and obvious notation
- Don't show all the steps

Theory and Papers with Models

Remember: **people have short attention spans**

Only show what is absolutely necessary to make your point

- If you have a "toy model" in paper, present this
- If you don't, but can simplify model in paper to make main point, do so for the presentation
- Skip parts of the model that are standard
    - e.g. in a macro model, if you have a very basic representative agent household, just say so, don't show it

Tables and Figures

Useful rule of thumb: **a figure is always better than a table**

Do **not** simply copy detailed tables from the paper – there is almost always too much information

Focus on the **main** result

- Don't have too many numbers on any slide
- Use **bold** or **color** to highlight what you need people to see
- Make sure figures are sharp and clear
- Try to avoid having "too much" going on in a figure
  - I **hate** three-dimensional graphs

Table of Contents, Transitions, and Backup Slides

Can be useful to have a "roadmap" slide once you transition from intro/research question into meat of the paper

Can reference back to this when transitioning to another part

Keep reminding your audience where you are and where you are going – do this out loud. "Next, I am going to . . . "

Good to have "backup" slides at end of presentation that you can link to in Beamer. Anticipate questions and have these ready. But if not central to main point, have them as backups

- Also useful to put "literature review" backup slide; only show if someone asks for it

Be Relaxed

Start talk by thanking organizers, say something nice about the department or university, or joke how it's nice to get away from your kids

Perfectly okay to make jokes (keep them PC) – audience will be more engaged

Make eye contact and stand up straight

Pace around the room – this will keep you more comfortable, and keep audience more engaged

Poke fun at yourself if you make a mistake

Handling Questions

You will get questions, perhaps many, some apparently hostile

Be courteous:

- "That's a great question, Joe!"
- If you don't know the answer, say so. Say "Let me think about that."
- Make sure you understand the question – it's fine to ask for a repeat, or to restate the question yourself

You need to be in control of the room

- Don't let questions get off on useless tangents
- Be polite but firm
- Say something like "Okay, I'd like to get back to . . . "

Admitting Deficiencies

It is perfectly okay (and often desirable) to point out problems with your approach, assumptions, or results

People will respect you more if you are honest and forthcoming

Strategy: "bad news, then good news" – defend problematic assumptions or results, turn into a positive

Perfectly okay to say "That's a great suggestion. I'll think about that."

Practice Makes Perfect

You will almost always be nervous before a talk

The more you do it, the better you'll get (and the more comfortable you will feel)

Goal: get lots of practice with a "home field advantage" (i.e. here) before venturing out into the broader world

You will almost never be a good judge of how a talk went, so don't try to grade yourself and Monday morning quarterback things

Student Activity

"Partner" students discuss and critique other student's research proposals