Guidelines on Seminar Presentations

Your main goal in presenting this seminar is to **communicate** your topic to an audience of **mixed backgrounds and interests**. This should **not** be a technical paper such as would be presented at a professional meeting. Your seminar **should** tell a scientific story in a way that <u>everyone present can understand</u> and go home with some <u>lesson learned</u>.

Purpose of Seminar:

A presentation concentrates on teaching something to the audience. A **good** presentation means that the audience understood the message. The first rule is to place yourself in the mind of your audience. The second rule is to provide the minimum amount of information to the audience; this helps overcome the temptation to fill presentations with details meant to impress the audience. So, make sure to:

- Try not to cover so many ideas, stick instead to a <u>**major theme**</u>.
- Focus on what the audience needs to know about the subject and not on what you want to tell them.
- Don't give too many experimental details unless the method is the main point of the talk.
- For each set of data, explain the significance of the findings, don't just only show it.
- Don't assume that the audience will know what you mean.
- Make transitions from one topic to another logical and smooth: "now I'd like to tell you…"
- Unlike a written report, the audience must be able to immediately grasp the information. So, keep it simple.
- Use repetition as a tool to help the audience remember important points.

Audience Analysis:

Remember that your audience will be scientifically literate but <u>**will not**</u> automatically understand terms, jargon, abbreviations, and methods used in all fields. When planning your seminar, put yourself in their shoes.

Explain all terms and concepts that are important for understanding your topic and will be used throughout your presentation.

Ask yourself:
What do they know?
What do they want to know?
What do they need to know in order to understand my presentation?

Use the answers to these questions to guide how you present your seminar.

Title

Make your title descriptive, succinct, informative and interesting.

Visual aids:

A visual aid is something your audience can see that **aids your speech content**. Always look and talk to the audience, **NOT** to the visual aid. **Don't read** directly from the slides; you will lose eye contact with the audience and run the risk of putting everyone to sleep because they can read faster mentally than you can verbally.

Animation is good and beneficial as long as it does not get too distracting.

> » *Font, color, background*

Decide what font, colors, graphics, background design and layout to use for your entire presentation. While you can use variation, **strive for consistency**: titles should be the same color, bullets should be the same color and shape, etc…Visual aids can be created using almost any color, but there should be enough contrast between foreground and background elements and too many colors can distract from the message. If you want to use graduated backgrounds, keep them subtle and smooth.

N.B: Sometimes different computers project colors differently, so make sure to check it out on the big screen before the actual presentation.

> » *Size and number of elements*

A limited number of elements, big graphics, and big text make reading easier. "*Less is more and big is beautiful*". It should be big enough to be seen at the end of the auditorium. Nothing aggravates the audience more than not being able to see what the speaker is talking about. Titles should be 36-48 point and text should be 26-36 point (72 points equals 1 inch). Also, keep similar text the same size from one visual to the next.

> » *Use of white space*

Blank areas in a visual help the reader through the data and avoid the appearance of overcrowding. Slides should have enough margins on all sides and eye friendly. Try to keep your slides neat and uncluttered.

» *Text*

Use **short and simple** phrases in place of sentences or paragraphs and limit the amount of information in the presentation. Each visual should be a hint and **not** the whole story. Visuals should have:

- One main point
- One thought per line
- No more than 5-7 words per line
- No more than 5-7 lines per visual

Use a combination of uppercase and lowercase lettering. **Using all capital is harder to read**. Avoid commas, semicolons, or periods in visuals. Instead, use bullets or numbers to separate and group ideas.

» *References*

You need to give credit to the work of others. Don't forget to include references on your visuals at the bottom in small font.

» *Graphs and tables*

Graphs and tables are the best way to summarize large quantities of raw data.

- Simplify the data
- Show only the essential information
- Be consistent in style and terminology, font, color, style…
- Data elements should be the thickest and the brightest colors. Frames, grid lines, axis lines, and error bars should be lighter in color and weight.
- X and Y axis lines should end at the last data point
- Include legends.

Proof read visuals, then have someone proof read them for you!!

How should the information be organized?

Developing an **outline** is important for a logical flow of ideas as well as serving as a **checklist** for items that appear in the slides per se.

- Introduction and background information (why is the work important? what related work exists?)
- Objectives of research
- Explanation of methods (what is unique about the presenter's approach?)

- Results
- Discussion and conclusion (did the results meet the objectives?)
- Relevance or significance, implications of findings (what is the overall scope of the work?)
- Future work (what happens next?)

> » *Introduction* (Tell them what you are going to say)

   The introduction serves to provide a **focus** (statement of main idea), a **reason to listen** (significance of the main idea), and an **orientation** (division of the presentation). Identify the problem and focus on the scientific observations that led to your research topic. Include some background information.

> » *Body* (Tell them)

   Choose the story you want to tell then present the data or experiments that are **essential** to your story. Be selective; **don't overwhelm** the audience with volumes of data that may just confuse them. This is **NOT** your thesis defense. Present your results in an **order and organization** that support and maintain the flow of your story and that facilitates understanding, even if that is not the order you used in the laboratory. Ideally, summarize after you finish each point to wrap up what you've said and connect it to the next argument. Repetition makes the idea stick in the audience's head. Never use a slide unless you give the audience **time to understand** its content. Presenting complex equations or tables "for show" is not useful. Only present material that you can take the time to explain and define.

> » *Conclusion* (Tell them what you told them)

   Take this time to repeat and **reemphasize** the most important conclusions. Show the significance of your work. Tell them exactly what YOU want them to walk away remembering.

Delivery

Well-done visuals and graphics are important in expressing ideas, and offering results that escape words. However, it is the oral communication that gives depth and understanding to the visuals.

> » *Practice*

Practice is very important for a successful presentation. It allows the speaker to spot flaws and enables smoother transitions from section to section. Try to **rehearse** with an audience of friends; it is the best way to get feedback and constructive criticism. Although you might first develop a script for your presentation, it **should never be read**. If you do use notes or cards during the seminar, try not to obviously read from them. **Know your talk** well enough that you speak out to your audience most of the time and just sneak a peak at your notes periodically to keep you on track.

» *Dress for success*

Look and act **professional**. Develop a confident (but not arrogant) stage presence. Look at your audience and make **frequent eye contact** with them. This conveys an air of confidence and knowledgeability about the subject matter. Avoid doing things that distract the audience such as nervous habits or noticeable repetitive hand motions.   Don't insult your audience or put them in a position of having to admit their ignorance. Don't ask, "how many of you don't know…?"; rather say, "some of you may not know…"

» *Don't be nervous*

"*The internal nervousness most speakers feel during presentations is usually **not seen externally***". It is a good idea to visit the auditorium and **practice before** your seminar. The familiarity with the environment is comforting. Also, get used to having the slides behind you and to looking at both very bright lights and very dark spaces. Practice how far your voice can project and whether slides are legible from a distance.

» *Don't speak too fast*

During an oral presentation, the speaker is in charge of speed control. **Sentences should be short** and main points should be repeated to aid memory and understanding. Your voice should be clear and your pace should vary according to the audience's familiarity or unfamiliarity with the subject. **Show excitement** by varying your voice pitch and tone. "Time practice" will tell you how much material can be presented in the time allotted. **Never try to include more information by speaking faster**.

» *Don't be boring*

Enthusiasm is contagious. If the speaker shows excitement for the topic, the audience will listen attentively. Listeners can **absorb only a few points** during a 20-30 minutes presentation. Concentrate on what is

significant and avoid intricate mathematics that are not critical to the presentation.

» *Handling questions*

During practice sessions, ask colleagues to pose what they feel might be typical questions. Keep your **answers short and to the point**. Preparing extra slides for anticipated questions is also a good practice. Never get into a power struggle with someone in the audience. Appropriate responses might be: "we have not performed those experiments yet", or "that is a very interesting idea; we'll have to give that some thought". If an answer will take an unreasonable period of time, say that you would be happy to discuss it after the session.

Don't let your presentation sound over-rehearsed!!