

Advice on preparing and presenting your research project information in class:

Use visual aids:

Most students use Powerpoint these days to organize their presentations. Powerpoint works well but has drawbacks. Powerpoint is useful because you can mix text and graphics, and can use a variety of types of graphics sequentially or simultaneously. Plus you can download images and graphics from the web and use them in your presentations. You should not use a dark or busy background with dark text. A text font without serifs (like Helvetica or Arial) is easier to read than one with serifs like Times. Don't try to use too many bells and whistles, which are distracting. Using Powerpoint does not absolve you of knowing your material and talking to your audience (rather than using Powerpoint as a prop and reading text from the slides – please do not do this). If you plan to use Powerpoint be sure to test your presentation on the Mac or PC in MS 301 before we start. There are a variety of ways to load your presentation onto the laptop. Probably the simplest is to use the small portable medium that is known variously as “thumb drive” or “flash drive.” I have one of these if you need to borrow it. Alternatively, you can drop your presentation into the folder in my FacBox called “behavior presentations” before the lab session, and test it the morning of the day you present.

Be organized:

Outline what you want to say. Follow the outline carefully, but don't read from Powerpoint slides. Use your visual aids to cue what you want to say. Give us as complete a story as possible in the time allotted.

Don't try to present too much information. Tell us what you did, why you did it (why it is important), what you found out, and what it means. Ruthlessly eliminate anything that is not crucial to your story.

Stay within your time limit. Each speaker will have 8-10 minutes to talk, plus 2 minutes for questions. Eight minutes will pass quickly once you get started. Practice your talk for timing.

Tell us a story:

It is difficult to listen to someone reading their manuscript. Talk to your audience. Tell us a story, and make it an interesting one. Include personal experiences, or information about the difficulties researchers experience. Tell us something funny; tell us something disturbing.

Don't be nervous:

We are all in this together. Everyone has to make a presentation, and many of you have never done this before. Speaking to an audience is a skill that must be developed, and everyone has to start somewhere. No one will laugh at you; it is usually hard to tell when someone is nervous.

To help with overcoming nervousness, memorize the first few lines of your talk. Once you get going, and past the first few lines, it is usually easier to just talk to the audience. Do not try to memorize the whole thing – use your visual aids and your outline to guide you.

Ask questions:

After your talk, members of the audience will ask questions. This is an opportunity to present additional information. It is also an opportunity to think about what you have done and said – you might want to do some of this beforehand, and try to anticipate some questions.

If you are asking a question of a speaker, make your question relevant and specific. Couch more general questions in terms that relate to the speaker's topic. Don't shy away from asking difficult questions, but do so in a cordial manner. Science advances through constructive criticism of data and ideas, so don't take this personally.