

Preparing a presentation

General

You have worked on your topic for a while. Many things will seem clear to you – but your audience might have never heard of them, your audience might have never heard of the problem you're working on. By the end of your presentation, you want them to know about your topic.

Know your time constraints

Your presentations will be 15 minutes long. Do a practice run and see whether you can give your presentation in 15 minutes. Probably it will be less time that you thought it would be.

What to include

Limit yourself to the essentials.

Make an outline of your story, i.e. create sections and subsections. Your audience should be able to keep the plot in mind so they know which part the thing you explain will play.

Possible plot

- A short intro.
- Your data and why they are interesting / problematic.
- If you have empirical results – what your results are.
- If you make a theoretical proposal – how you suggest to explain the data
- (Longer presentations would have to include things like how this relates to other people's proposals, and what implications your proposal has.)

Always use examples, linguists feed on examples.

How much background to include

Make sure to state your background and assumptions with respect to the phenomenon your working on.

You don't need to explain the background we all share (This is a variation of the "Don't start your essay with 'In the dawn of mankind...'" rule. For

instance, unless this is directly relevant for your presentation, it's not necessary to state "I assume that there is more than linear order when it comes to relation between words in a sentence").

If you feel caught between these two antagonists and don't know who to side with – rather err on the side of redundancy. People don't usually mind being hearing things they already know, but they do mind not being able to follow your presentation.

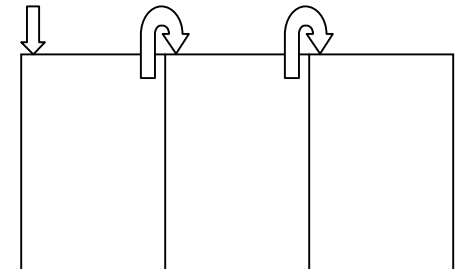
Posters

People should be able to read your poster in about 10 minutes. Aim for maybe about 1000 words (just as a guideline for the nervous, number of words is not at all important).

Have a title that's not too long, but tells people what your poster is about. In a poster session people will often decide whether to view a poster or not based on the title.

Layout

Use columns so that people read you poster in the following direction.



Aim for about a 10 – 12 words per line. The longer your lines are, the more leading (space between them) you should have.

Use only very legible fonts. Don't use fonts smaller than 18pt for your body text. Both sans-serif fonts and serif fonts are acceptable. A typical combination is a sans serif font (like this one) for the title, and a serif font (like this one) for the body text.

Things should be easy to read from distances up to 7 feet.

The use of graphic elements is nice (text attributes, color, images etc.), but only use them for a purpose. For instance you could give all section headers a different color – your audience will be able to follow the main plot just by quickly reading the headers. (If suddenly something that's not a header will

show up looking similar to that people will get confused though!) If in doubt, keep it simple.

Practical

There are two main approaches – the “fancy pants” poster and the “arts and crafts” poster. Both can turn out terrific, and both can turn out disastrous.

The fancy pants poster is a poster that’s created and more importantly *printed* as one piece. See f.i.

<http://www.writing.eng.vt.edu/courses/presentations/poster1.pdf>

The main disadvantage of the fancy pance type poster is that the printing is ridiculously expensive. The only workaround here is to save it as pdf and print it onto individual letter size pages, which you then glue together (there should be an option in Adobe Acrobat).

The arts and crafts type poster is constructed from smaller, home printable pieces. Ideally they will combine into a homogenous unit in the end. Here is a good example

<http://www.ncsu.edu/project/posters/examples/example01.html>

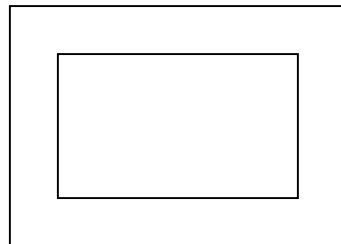
The arts and crafts poster has some major advantages. It allows for “last minute corrections”. It’s potentially cheaper. You can include things you couldn’t include in the fancy pants poster.

It’s main disadvantage is that it easily can look like a big mess.

Software

For a fancy pants poster people most often use PowerPoint, and you can find a variety of templates online. If you want more fine-grained control over the layout, software like Adobe InDesign is preferable.

For the arts and crafts approach any word processing software will do the job. You can for instance use horizontally oriented pages in Word and glue them onto colored construction paper. Each sub-section could have it’s own paper, each section it’s own color.



[Web resources \(google turns up many more\)](#)

<http://www.swarthmore.edu/NatSci/cpurrrin1/posteradvice.htm>

<http://faculty.washington.edu/scporter/INQUAposters.html>

<http://www.ce.umn.edu/~smith/supplements/poster/guide.htm>

Slide Presentations

Giving a slide presentation differs in some important respects from giving a poster. You will always *present* the slide show. In fact, your slide show should only support your presentation, the main element should be you!

Therefore, nothing distracting goes on slides. Try to stay away from that swooshing sound, that nice rotating effect when the slide disappears.

[What goes on slides, how much, how many slides](#)

As a rule of thumb, have at most one slide per minute.

Never put anything on a slide that you are not going to explain.

Have at most five bullet points per slide. As a general guideline, somewhere between 20 and 40 words are good for a slide. Never put more than 80. Avoid long text that people have to read off of the slide (unless it’s a quote, and you will read it out loud).

More generally, do not crowd the slides – everything has to have a purpose.

It’s nice if each slide has a title that explains what the slide is about and where it fits into the presentations (f.i. Uses of Pronouns II: Bound Variables).

Slides are a great place to have something up that you want to refer to, f.i. a graph, or an example with glosses. Remember though that this information is gone once you move on to the next slide. Blackboard use and slides don’t exclude each other. Alternatively you can put the same slide at several places in your presentations. If details changed, it’s good to highlight them.

Use a large font (aim for a font that would allow you to have about 10-15 lines of text per slide).

Practical

You can play slide shows directly from PowerPoint, or using PowerPoint's .pps format. Both of these methods require that you have PowerPoint.

Another (often safer, though more limited) option is to play presentations using Acrobat Reader, that is to display a series of pdf files in full screen size.

If you use that latter option, you don't need to have PowerPoint. You can use your usual word processing program to create slides (letter size landscape, large font). Then create pdf files from your word processing program.

There are several options for doing so. You can buy Adobe Acrobat. Or you can install a postscript printer driver, print to a file, and convert that file to pdf with a free software, ghostscript.

For the former, check the campus store, or

<http://www.adobe.com>

For the latter, check

general instructions: <http://kenchiro.tripod.com/howtoPDF.html>

ps driver: <http://www.adobe.com/products/printerdrivers/main.html>

ps2pdf: <http://www.cs.wisc.edu/~ghost/>

or

cute pdf: <http://www.cutepdf.com/Products/CutePDF/writer.asp>

pdf995: <http://www.pdf995.com/>

For your class project you can simply send us the slides you created in your word processor and we will convert them to PowerPoint for you.

If you use WordPerfect, Works, or another non-Word program, please send us your file as .rtf (save as "Rich Text Format") as well, since we might not be able to read your programs own format.