

LIN 405 - Writing in Linguistics

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Academic Presentations

- In many cases, presenting your paper at a conference or similar event is a crucial step in writing a paper
- Feedback before submitting to a journal:
 - Most conferences review abstracts
 - Questions after your presentation
- Having to make slides/a handout/a poster helps you think about what's important and how to structure an argument
 - But be careful, structuring a talk is often different than structuring a paper!

How to give an academic talk

Principles of Effective Talks

1. Communicate your arguments and evidence
2. Persuade your audience that they are true
3. Engage and entertain

Rules of thumb

1. Talk don't read
2. Stand don't sit
3. Move don't stand still
4. Vary the pitch of your voice rather than speaking monotone
5. Speak loudly and face the audience
6. Make eye contact

Rules of thumb

7. Focus on main points
8. Use outlines, images, and charts
9. Finish within your time limit
10. Rehearse
11. Summarize your main points at the beginning and end
12. Notice your audience and respond to its needs
13. Emulate excellent speakers

Preparing for your talk

- Hack it down to size
- ~ 100 words per minute
- Make an outline

Presentation Design

- Make your slides precise and uncluttered
- If you need more text, use more slides
- Use images
- Always choose white or light-colored slide backgrounds
- Keep the glitz factor low
- Don't just read off the screen

Timing Tips

- Practice, and then practice again, and then practice again
- Use a personal timer
- Decide in advance what can be cut
- Avoid improvising

Formatting Tips

- Use visual aids (images, charts, graphs)
- Cite your sources on the slides
- Summarize your talk at both the beginning and the end
- Make sure your talk has a defined endpoint
- Anticipate questions and include extra material on "appendix" slides

Geoff Pullum's Five Golden Rules (for giving academic presentations)

1. Don't ever begin with an apology
 2. Don't ever underestimate the audience's intelligence
 3. Respect the time limits
 4. Don't survey the whole damn field
 5. Remember that you're an advocate, not the defendant
- Bonus: Expect questions that will floor you

LSA Paper Guidelines

Basics

- Organize the talk around 1-2 interesting findings
- Tailor your talk to the audience (but assume a high level of intelligence)
- Don't do things that will annoy your audience

Things to include

- The general problem area
- The particular question addressed
- The way you address it
- The findings
- The significance of the findings
- The next steps to be taken

Handouts

- Many theoretical presentations are done using handouts
- Necessary if you have lots of language data you want to share
- Remember that the handout is not your talk but instead a supplement to your talk

Slides

- Don't use both a handout and slides
- If the audience is reading your slides then they are not listening to you
- No more than 8 lines of text per slide
- One slide to two minutes of presentation is a decent rule of thumb
 - I've heard one minute per slide in my personal experience

Presentation

- Practice a lot and talk slowly
- Introduction and framing of the question should take up ~25% of the talk
- Presentation of data/findings should take up ~50% of the talk
- Summary should take up ~25% of the talk
- Tell the audience your main points early and repeat them often

Questions

Question period

- Most academic presentations have a question period after the main talk
- Basically two types of questions:
 1. Clarification
 2. Probing
- It's ok to say you don't know the answer to a question, but you should either divert the question into an area where you can talk or tell the asker you will discuss it with them offline
- Good talks are structured in a way that will funnel listeners into asking the questions you want to answer and can talk about

Student Questions

- Where will a presentation be held normally? A big hall or a smaller room?
- All three articles ring an alert never to go over time as it is considered to be rude. However, if the presenter runs over time only because some "smart" audience continuously interrupted with their questions in the middle of the speech and cannot finish his presentation on time, what should he do? Or will he be excused to run a bit overtime to quickly go over the rest of the key points?
- If an audience exhibits an aggressive tone or manner while asking a question (as in they sound like they are out to get you) how do you deal with this without looking awkward or unprepared?

- Any advice for remote presenting? You can't make eye contact in the same way over Zoom
- Is it ok to take questions in the middle of a talk or wait til the end for them?
- How long do academic talks have to be? Or does it depend what the topic is?
- Why don't linguists get taught on how to present? I know some do like at Hofstra they have a big focus on it but many schools do not? Why is that considering that so much of what is done after researching is presenting shouldn't we be taught to do it well?

- Are there any tips for public speaking nerves?
- Why is it not good to use both slides and handouts?
- Should we include our email in our presentations?
- How effective are metaphors or anecdotes when giving a speech? Should we avoid opening up with a metaphor or anecdotes in our speeches?

References

- <https://www.linguisticsociety.org/resource/lsa-paper-guidelines-0>
- <https://people.ucsc.edu/~pullum/goldenrules.html>
- Edwards, P. N. (2013). How to Give an Academic Talk, v5. 2. School of the Information University of Michigan, MI, USA.