Guidelines for student presentations

PAPER PRESENTATIONS

General points:

The audience has only one chance to understand your work, so it must be well organized, logically developed, stripped of extraneous details, and smoothly delivered. The goal of a presentation is to communicate why the research/project was undertaken, how it was done, and what was learnt. Communicate this clearly, succinctly and convincingly.

Preparing the presentation:

1. **Presenting a paper isn't merely a case of paraphrasing it**. Certain parts need to be stripped down, while others need more "airtime". Usually, the methods section can be edited down to the bare bones – if people have questions about the methods, they will come out in the question session at the end. While methods are edited down, results should get more airtime.
2. **Start with providing background information**, drawing from the Introduction, other studies, and even the discussion, if you need to, and then end the introduction section with a concise statement of the specific question or questions addressed.
3. **Tell a story.** Present the study in sections, if it is composed of a number of small experiments or investigations. Draw conclusions from each section of the study, as you present them, to make the link between the finding and the conclusions stronger. You need to lead the audience from point to point. For example, if you tackled a number of experiments/studies in the paper, present each separately – i.e. first specific question, methods, key results, some discussion (and how it might have led you to pose the second question), and then onto the next question (question, methods, key results, discussion… etc.).
4. **Summarize the major findings** of the research at the end of the talk, taking care to make each point separately.

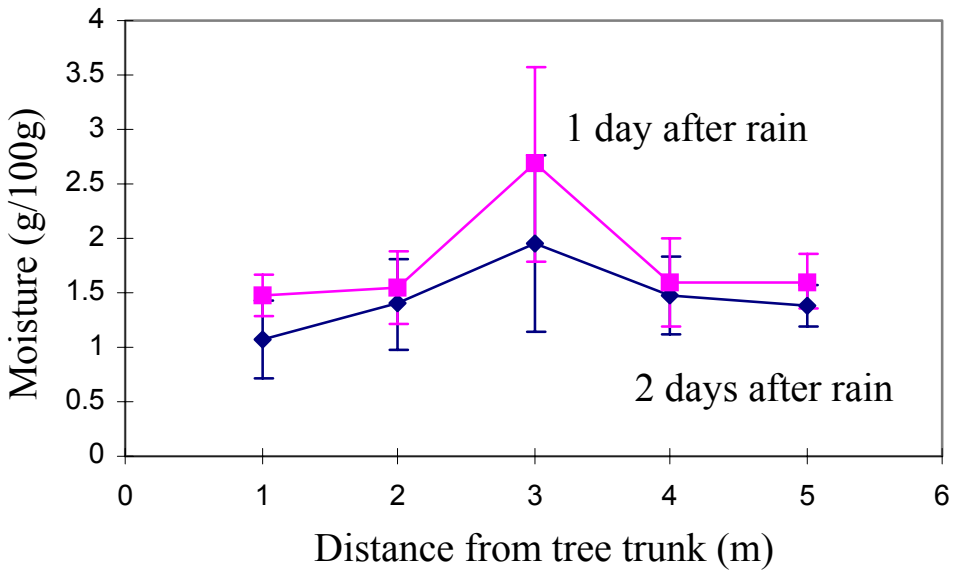
Making the presentation:

1. **Practice makes less nervous**. Most of us get nervous when giving a presentation. One way to minimize your nerves is to practise your presentation. The more you have practised, the more you will be able to reassure yourself that you know what you are going to say and how you are going to say it.
2. **Don't rush.**
3. **Make your visual aids work for you**. Draw the audience's attention to, say, trends in the data, or even interesting things you might have captured on film. Visual aids are meant to facilitate your communication, not just make the audience stare at the screen, instead of you. Another point about making the visual aids work for you – if, when you need to, you are able to use the laser pointer without shaking too much, then by all means do so, it really helps to lead the audience to the point you're trying to make. If you can't, rather refer to, say, "the lower line", or "the line in blue" or "graph on the left hand side"…
4. **Be clear on unfamiliar terms**: Make sure that unfamiliar terms that you use are presented in the visual aids. **This is particularly true for abbreviations**. For example, if you use "NDVIs" in your presentation, be sure to include what the abbreviation stands for in your visual aids.
5. **Don't mumble, face the audience, make eye contact**, and **try to sound interested** in what you're saying.
6. **Warn your audience that the end is near**. Slip in a phrase like, "One final point…" or, even, "In conclusion…", or just plain old "Finally,…"
7. **End your talk** by thanking the audience for their attention.
8. **Stick to the time limit.** Not doing so suggests you were unable to highlight the salient points of your research. It also is inconsiderate to the audience and the conference organizers.

9. **Handling questions:** If you have the presence of mind to do so, paraphrase a question before answering it to help those in the audience who may have not heard the question correctly. Also, don't be afraid to say you don't know the answer to a question.

Visual Aids:

1. **Make sure visual aids are large enough** to be visible to the audience at the back of the room. Err on the side of caution if you have no idea how large the venue is going to be.
2. **Try not to mix colours that colourblind people might have trouble distinguishing.** Do not superimpose red lines on green backgrounds and vica versa as colourblind people can't see the difference between the colours.
3. **Try to avoid too much text on slides**. It can be quite boring. If you must have text, try to introduce each point as you go along, otherwise the audience tends to read on ahead while you're still discussing the first point.
4. The audience loves pictures and photographs.
5. **Maps, etc**. all help make the point.
6. **Rework figures.** A figure presented in an oral presentation has to be instantly comprehensible. To facilitate this, enlarge the text labelling your axes. If you have two lines on a graph, make it clear which is which with clear labelling) (see example below). Even better, if you are a whiz with Powerpoint, introduce the lines onto the graph separately.



These notes were compiled by members of the AZEF committee, and were guided by:

Pechenick, Jan. A. 1996. *A short guide to writing about biology*. Longman, New York.