

Guidance for Research Presentations

WSU School of Economic Sciences Graduate Program

Last updated 24 October 2023.

This document has been developed to help WSU School of Economic Sciences (SES) graduate students develop presentations for the job market and professional conferences.

Presentations play a vital role in disseminating research. Job market presentations usually span 60 to 70 minutes divided between 45 to 50 minutes of presenting your job market paper and 15-20 minutes of questions throughout and at the end of the talk. However, the university that you are presenting at should provide specific guidelines for the length and expectations for the talk. Conference presentations can range from 7 to 25 minutes with questions following the presentation and lasting about 2 to 10 minutes.

The following material provides guidance developed by SES faculty for the structure of a research presentation and tips on creating professional slides.

Structure of a Research Presentation

- Introduction about 20% of your allotted time
 - Research question.
 - Start with defining your research question!
 - Justify why the research question is important.
 - Background
 - Literature
 - Place your work in the context of the existing literature.
 - Be clear on the research/knowledge gap.
 - How do you address this research gap?
 - Contribution statement.
 - Briefly summarize your results
- Methods and Data about 30-40% of your time
 - If your paper is purely theoretical or econometric methods
 - Do not overwhelm the audience with notation.
 - Be as simple as possible while still displaying your technical ability.
 - Theoretical work should clearly
 - explain the main assumptions
 - rationalize your model
 - discuss your results (Propositions and Lemmas)
 - present comparative statics
 - Applied econometric work should clearly explain
 - underlying economic theory
 - hypotheses to be tested
 - econometric model and why it is appropriate for this research
 - identification/endogeneity issues
 - Data should be at most 1 to 2 slides unless you have a good reason for more.

- Results about 35-45% of your time
 - Easy-to-read, simple tables
 - You will likely have to simplify the tables for the presentation from those in the paper.
 - Focus on presenting the key results that drive home your takeaway message.
 - Explicitly answer your research question and hypotheses.
 - Provide economic intuition behind the results.
- Conclusions about 5% of your time
 - Give a brief summary of what you did and what you found. (This could be skipped for short talks.)
 - Provide a new insight into the meaning of your results.
 - Put your work in a broader context that shows its importance.
 - Policy recommendations?

General Example of Slide Content/Flow

- A 20-minute talk should have about 10 slides, averaging 2 minutes per slide.
 - 1) Intro: Topic background and definitions.
 - 2) Intro: Objective
 - 3) Intro: Contribution
 - 4) Theory: Setup
 - 5) Theory: Hypotheses
 - 6) Data: Description
 - 7) Econometric model: 1 (e.g., functional form)
 - 8) Econometric model: 2 (e.g., focal points of model)
 - 9) Results:1 [specific message]
 - 10) Results:2 [specific different message]

Tips for Preparing Research Presentations

1. Develop a detailed outline of the paper.
 - This will serve as a guide to what to include in the presentation.
2. Use the slides as your guide through your talk.
 - Use simple, short phrases for your bullets so that you can quickly look at the bullets to remember the content and order of what to discuss without disrupting the flow of the talk.
 - That is, each bullet should be no more than one line.
 - A bullet that is longer than one line makes it difficult for the audience and yourself to read the bullet. The audience will spend time trying to read the bullet and not listening to your story.
 - You do not need to use complete sentences but make sure the visuals are clear and easy to read and understand from the perspective of the audience.
 - If your bullets are easy for you to glance at without disrupting the flow of your talk, then the bullets should also be easy for the audience to read and understand the key points you are making.
 - In other words, design your slides to complement your spoken words, not compete with them.

3. Convey one message with each slide.
 - Emphasizing the “so what” of the slide helps direct attention and understanding.
4. It is okay—particularly for those who do not speak English as a first language—to create a set of presenter notes separate from your slides.
 - Write down the specific phrases that you want to use.
 - Practice the presentation many times such that the language becomes natural, and no one knows you scripted it in advance.
 - NEVER read directly from a script during your presentation.
5. Avoiding overwhelming presentations
 - Do not try to cram too much
 - Into your talk
 - In your slides
 - Know in advance the takeaway message (objective) of your talk. Stick to it. Do not stray from it.
 - Typically, you cannot include all the work from a completed project in a presentation (particularly in a shorter conference presentation).
 - What you do present
 - Must be cohesive and focused on your main takeaway message.
 - Must not be rushed.
 - Must be clear and precise.
 - Be concise verbally and visually.
 - You want to guide your audience through your research, not overwhelm the audience by trying to prove how smart you are.
 - **Simplify, then simplify again, and then make your slides simpler.**
6. We encourage students to use timing or animation to parcel out slides a bit at a time.
 - This helps keep the audience engaged and focused on the current point you are talking about as opposed to reading ahead and not listening.
7. Be ready for multiple **audience questions regarding EVERY single modeling assumption and/or identification strategy** in your paper (this is **EXTREMELY** important for academic job market talks).
 - Just because you believe an assumption or identification strategy is obvious does not imply that all audience members will also perceive it as self-evident.
8. Presentation style
 - Do not read a script.
 - Do not read directly from the slides.
 - Look at the audience!
 - Speak clearly and do not speak fast.
 - Have points of emphasis and vary your tone (i.e., avoid a monotone presentation).
9. Know your audience.
 - Tailor your presentation to the audience.
 - For job market seminars, you must balance displaying your economic and technical ability with making the material accessible for economists outside of your field.
 - On a similar note, do not assume that every audience member will have a detailed knowledge of your modeling, estimation approach, or why your problem is important.

- This is especially important when presenting at interdisciplinary departments like schools of public policy, public health, environment, etc.
 - When putting your slides and talk together, think like an audience member, not a speaker!
 - Just like writing: Think like the reader and anticipate the reader's questions.
- 10. Audience Control
 - No one will control your audience but you.
 - You must control when you allow questions (during job market talks, it is standard to take questions throughout the talk).
 - You control when you answer questions.
 - You control when to move on from a question or to the next topic.
 - If you let the audience “hijack” your talk, you will be the one that runs out of time.
- 11. **Complete your talk within the allotted time.**
 - You should not rush to complete your presentation on time. Speaking fast, particularly to complete your slides on time, will frustrate the audience and hinder their understanding of your research.
 - If you run out of time (which you should not if you practice and control the audience), then know where/what you want to cut short or skip.
 - Practice!
 - by yourself several times.
 - in front of fellow students.
- 12. There is no professional expectation that presentations be done in PowerPoint or Latex/Beamer.
 - Use whichever program you are most comfortable with.

Additional Resources

- [Fixing Terrible Economics Presentations:](https://orderstatistic.wordpress.com/2014/04/25/fixing-terrible-economics-presentations/)
<https://orderstatistic.wordpress.com/2014/04/25/fixing-terrible-economics-presentations/>
- [How to Give an Applied Micro Talk: Unauthored Notes:](https://scholar.harvard.edu/files/shapiro/files/applied_micro_slides.pdf)
https://scholar.harvard.edu/files/shapiro/files/applied_micro_slides.pdf
- [How to Present a Paper: A Speaker's Guide:](https://cs.msutexas.edu/~ranette/CMPS4991/Update%20How%20to%20Present.ppt)
<https://cs.msutexas.edu/~ranette/CMPS4991/Update%20How%20to%20Present.ppt>
- Creating Effective Slides:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=meBXuTIPJQk&t=95s>
- William Thomson. A Guide for the Young Economist
 - [A Guide for the Young Economist on JSTOR](#)