

Tips on Giving a Presentation in Economics
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1. General questions and issues.

When should you give a talk? Graduate students tend to wait too long to present their research. Preparing a presentation (and writing a paper) forces to think about your work in a different manner than when you are using data, thinking about the model, or talking with your classmates and professors. The process of preparing a presentation and actually giving the talk are integral parts of the process.

Giving a research talk takes practice. It's a good idea to practice presenting in study groups, the Graduate Economics Clubs, etc. first. You can present someone else's published work or a literature survey of an area that interests you. Then you can move on to present early versions of your own work. Work with your advisor to find the right time to present in EARL.

What are you trying to accomplish in the talk? You want to convey your results and convince the audience that you and they have learned something new. Importantly, though, you are trying to improve your research. You want to make it easy to get useful feedback. Do not be argumentative with the audience. Be open to comments. On the job market, your talk is an evaluation of your teaching skills, communication skills, research skills, data skills, etc. Make sure all of strengths show through in the talk

How often should you present your research? As often as you can. An effective presentation improves your research and will eventually get you a job. To present well, you need to practice often.

Go through your slides with your advisor and/or committee members before you present. You want the presentation to be productive for both you and the audience. Faculty feedback can help resolve a lot of issues before the seminar.

Know your audience. Are they all economists? Are they all in your field?

2. Giving the presentation

The presentation and the paper are not the same thing. You cannot present everything that's in your paper. So the first thing to do is prioritize and figure out what you want to talk about in your allotted time.

Grab people's attention. While your title slide is up, start your talk by thanking everyone for inviting you and for coming to your talk. When your title slide is up, everyone is focused on you and not what's on your slides. Use this short time wisely. Give a clear statement of the research question. It's ok if you repeat yourself in the next few minutes.

Convey the most important information right away. The first few minutes of the presentation should give clear answers to the following questions:

- a. What is the research question?
- b. Why is the question important? Does it have policy relevance? Relevance for theory?
- c. What are the specific contributions of your paper? i.e. what do we know and how does this paper advance what we know? [BUT: I think many people spend too much time summarizing other papers, especially papers that aren't directly relevant.]

- d. For empirical papers, preview your identification strategy
- e. What do you find? Be specific

The presentation needs to be organized

- a. There should be a logical flow from one section of the paper to the next.
- b. You don't have to have a Table of Contents slide, but it might be useful. It may also be useful to return to the ToC during the talk to remind people where you are and where you are going.
- c. Every slide should have a point. And you and the audience should know that point.
- d. Stay "on message". Everyone should know what the goal of each piece of the presentation is and how it relates to your overall paper.
- e. Make your slides professional. Slides should be easy to read, even in the back of the room. Duh. Don't put too much on a slide. Don't have grammatical errors. Don't be lazy.
- f. Tables and figures should be properly labelled and easy to understand.
- g. Tables don't have to be the same as what's in the paper. You can show parts of tables, simplified versions, etc. You can use figures to illustrate coefficients that appear in tables in the paper.
- h. Avoid putting things on a slide that you don't plan to discuss. The audience will read whatever you put on the slide.

Key elements of most presentations. This is not meant to be an outline of a presentation. It's just a list of the most common parts of a presentation with a few comments on them.

1. Introduction (see above).
2. Conceptual framework. How should we think about the issue? Are you going to use a mathematical model? If there is a mathematical model, be really clear what the payoff is before you spend time going through it. Be clear how the conceptual framework relates to your overall project. You can always make a model more complex, but what's the payoff. Don't let audience members take over a discussion of a framework by pointing out ways in which your framework is a simplification.
3. Literature. I generally don't like literature review sections in papers. People's eyes easily gloss over this section. Instead, discussion of the literature is more useful when it is done in the context of another substantive part of the paper. Same thing applies in a presentation. Having said that, it can be very useful to have a single slide that summarizes what we know.
4. Data. Generally, be brief. Give the important information. You don't need to explain how you processed/cleaned the data.
5. Econometric framework. Be really clear about the equation you will estimate, what you'll control for, etc. Explain any threats to identification. Explain your identification method and identification assumption. Giving examples is a good idea. Explain how you test your assumptions.
6. Main results.
7. Other results
8. Implications and conclusions

Pausing is important. When you say something important, pause and let it sink in. Don't rush through important parts of the talk. Pausing also invites questions.

Pay attention to the feedback you receive. Have a friend take detailed notes during the seminar so you have a record of every question and comment. Always have a paper and pen handy to take notes on the comments people give you (even if someone is taking notes for you). This will help you later and it also shows respect to your audience.

Know how long you have to present and whether questions are allowed during the talk. Conference presentations are generally 10-20 minutes with questions at the end. Presentations on campuses are generally 60-90 minutes with interruptions for questions.

Always be prepared to make adjustments during the presentation. While you will try to anticipate how much you can present in your allotted time, the amount of questions and discussion will greatly influence how much you can present. At any point during the talk, you should know how much time you have left and whether you are ahead or behind schedule. You can always end early, but it is a good idea to have some slides handy that you would only show if you happen to be running ahead of schedule. More importantly, know what slides you will skip if you fall behind. The worst thing you can do is spend too much time on the front end of the presentation and then not have time to present your results.

Questions should enhance the experience. A seminar is a participatory activity. But the presenter is in charge. It is your job to manage your time and, if necessary, cut off questions. It is ok to tell people you want to move on and will return to their question later, perhaps after the seminar. You also don't need to spend time on irrelevant questions.

You don't have to let the audience interrupt you. When someone raises their hand, you are allowed to acknowledge them, finish your thought or finish your slide, and then let them make their point.

You don't have to let the audience change the order of your presentation. Just because someone asks about your data or your results when you are trying to talk about something else doesn't mean you have to indulge them. It's ok to answer if you want. It's also ok to give a short answer and say you'll talk more about that later. It's also ok not to answer and just say that you'll get to that later.

You should be comfortable saying that you don't know the answer to a question, saying that you don't understand a question, or would like the questions rephrased.

3. After the presentation.

Follow up with key people. It's a good idea to follow-up in person after the seminar with people who had key pieces of feedback. You should also follow up with your committee members.

Write down detailed notes on the feedback you received. The scribbles you took during the seminar may not make sense a week later. Write it all up in longhand. Also take this opportunity to think about the next steps in the project.

Make note about how you will adjust the presentation going forward. Did you spend too much time on a particular part; not enough time on something else; etc.

4. Other good sources

Jesse Shapiro "How to Give an Applied Micro Talk: Unauthoritative Notes"
https://www.brown.edu/Research/Shapiro/pdfs/applied_micro_slides.pdf

Masayuki Kudamatsu "Tips 4 Economists": <https://sites.google.com/site/mkudamatsu/tips4economists>