A Presentation on Conference Presentations

The Political Communication Division’s Presentation Guide for First-Time Attendees
You are here for a reason - your work impressed anonymous reviewers and has earned its spot on the programme.

Everyone gets nervous before their presentation (yes, everyone!). Nerves are a natural reaction to presenting your work to a large audience.

As a PhD student, you are at a different stage of your career, and people are aware of this. Your presentation will likely not be on the level of a seasoned academic, and that is completely fine.

Every person’s research and presentation style is unique. Take from this guide what you feel can compliment your existing style.
Structure

Present from back to front
- Start with the most important points (findings/takeaway messages) of your work!
- What is one sentence you want your audience to walk away with?
- Presentations can have an Appendix. Put any information that is not essential at the end of the presentation if you feel you might need it.

A presentation is not a paper - don’t treat it as such!
- You will have to be selective about what information you keep in the presentation, as you won’t have the space to elaborate fully on your theory, methods, results, and implications.
- For example: Are you especially proud of your methods? It’s expected to focus on some areas more than others.
On the Introduction

Make sure you give all your relevant information
- Your name
- Contact details (email, website, social media)
- University
- Status (PhD Student, postdoc)

Humanize yourself!
- A small joke/commentary can do wonders to engage your audience as more than a researcher. Are you still jet lagged? Dying of hunger? Overwhelmed by the wonderful programme? Share this with your audience!

Tell your audience what your paper finds right away
- “In this presentation, I will show that X, Y, and Z”
- Real-world examples help to catch people’s attention
On the Theory

Keep your theory as brief as possible

▪ A conference presentation is not the place to showcase your vast understanding of the literature.
▪ Do not attempt to engage with every study you cite in your paper.
▪ You don’t have to include all your research questions (or hypotheses) – listing them can take a lot of valuable time.

Get to the point quickly!

▪ What is the gap that your study fills?
▪ Use your theory section to highlight the relevance of your work: Why should your audience care? Repeat this throughout.
On the Methods

Simplify the methodology employed

- Assume your audience has some base understanding of your methods.
- If you are interested in people engaging with your methods, you can always ask your audience to approach you either during Q and A or after.
- If using survey methods, skip the operationalization of variables, especially if they are commonly used.
On the Results

This should be the core part of your presentation: What did you find?

- Because of time constraints, focus on key results
- Remind your audience how this relates to the story you are telling

If you use figures/diagrams

- Make sure it is large enough to read and intuitive enough to understand.
- Highlight the information that matters! This allows us to gauge what number/bar/line/arrow we should be paying attention to.
- Pause and allow your audience to understand what you are showing them.
- Use colour-blind-friendly colour pallets.

If possible, avoid long tables

- At the very least, simplify the information provided.
On the Conclusion

Summarize your results
- What did you find?
- Why does it matter?

Make it easy for your audience to find you
- Use a QR code that links to your website, Twitter profile, or preprint/published paper.
- Additionally, write out all your contact information.

Invite the audience to engage
- Let your audience know if there are specific elements you want comments on

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Design

The basics
- Images = good | Lots of text = bad
- Introduce each bullet-point of text one by one to guide your audience (you don’t want them trying to read your whole slide while you are talking).

Add your name and contact details on every slide! You want your audience to remember who you are and how they can reach out to you
- This can be as simple as your last name, but can also include paper title, email address, Twitter handle, etc.
- This is especially important because audience members will regularly take pictures of slides - make sure they can trace these back to you.

Check if your university has an official template
- This can take away a lot of the stress linked to formatting your work.
Preparation

You generally have very little time to communicate a lot of information

- Prepare a script and memorize it.
- Time yourself! Make sure you are within the 12 minutes of the allotted time (shorter in high-density panels).
  
  Every minute you extend your presentation is a minute taken away from someone else's time.

Predict questions and have answers ready

- Make extra (backup) slides that elaborate on interesting aspects you might have cut.
- Pro tip: Have a friend/colleague in the audience ask a question you really want to answer.

When you practice

- Pause and let the information sink in, especially with figures.
- Be enthusiastic about your work: if you seem interested and passionate, others will also be.
- Check and remove self-questioning language: "I think", "I feel", "I tried."
- If you can stomach it: record your presentation and look for your ‘filler sounds’ ("ehhh", “uhmmm”).
- Smile always - as humans, our natural response is to smile back!
Day of the Presentation

Before the presentation
- Locate the room early, so you don’t have any issues finding it.
- Have presentation on usb stick + email (backups).
- Some computers don’t show presentation notes. Make sure to have them printed or on another device if you feel you need them.
- Avoid elements that depend on a room’s technology capability, such as video, audio, and wifi.

During the Q&A session
- If you receive several questions at once, write them down to make sure you address them.
- Don’t be scared of being unable to answer a question! This is common, especially in projects involving several people. It is perfectly fine to let someone know that you will check and get back with an answer later.
- It is completely fine to ask your fellow panellists your own questions.
Everyone has a ‘first time’

- Despite what pre-presentation anxiety might tell you, you are an expert in your field! No one has worked on your specific research questions for as long as you have - you will do great.
- Your presentation is an opportunity to inspire, engage and connect with others, and that's something to be excited about!
- A lot of other attendees are there for the first time, too!

Remember, being invited to the conference is already an achievement!