

Guidelines for Presentations*

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“A good speech has a good beginning and a good end, and both should be as close together as possible.”

Anonymous (often assigned to Mark Twain)

Assuming that your course requires a presentation as examination, I have compiled some helpful tips and information for you below. Although I consider these contents to be generally useful for all presentations, they are only binding for my courses. For presentations with other lecturers, please inquire about the valid regulations and their expectations. This document will be updated regularly, so please pay attention to the release date. Please read this document carefully before asking questions. I reserve the right not to answer questions that are thoroughly explained here; or if your question is not referring to the relevant section of this document. I am open to constructive suggestions and appreciate your feedback!

The Elephant in the Room

Probably you have watched innumerable presentations in your life — and hand on heart — how often were you excited about it? Most people are somehow self-taught when it comes to presentations — you just try it out and look at what others are doing. Unfortunately, there are a lot of mistakes that are very common — and then you take them over because you think it’s okay and that’s how it should be. As a matter of fact, only a few deal with the topic of “how do I make attractive presentations” intensively. However, it is worth it, because if you already avoid the biggest mistakes and take a few things to heart, you can significantly improve the quality of your presentations. I can generally recommend three sources on this topic: Kapterev (2011), Cochrane (2005), and Minto (2008). Of course, there are also many online sources on the topic of presentations. If you find an interesting one, feel free to let me know. It is especially important that you actively engage with the topic. Nothing is worse than starting with an apology for not being able to perform at your best. The audience takes time to listen to you, but is less interested in why you are not well prepared, why you are skipping certain slides due to time constraints, or why the data in the table is so small that it cannot be recognized. Your audience is like customers whom you want to convince with your message. ***Just do it (right)!***

*Translation from the German version by ChatGPT with adjustments where necessary by the author.

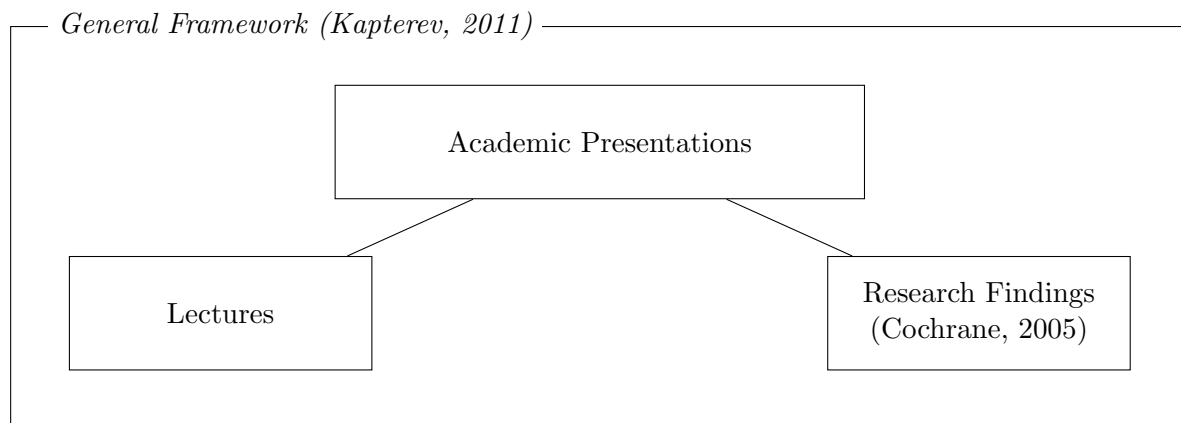


Figure 1: In the academic context, there are two main types of presentations: lectures and research results. While the work of Kapterev (2011) provides general guidance for all presentations, when presenting research results, it is also important to follow the *Writing Tips for Ph.D. Students* by Cochrane (2005).

Structure and Characteristics of Academic Presentations

For academic presentations, the same rules apply as for all other presentations. Figure (1) shows the basic categorization of academic presentations into teaching and research presentations. However, when presenting research results, there are some peculiarities that we will examine in more detail below. Very fundamentally, start your presentation with something exciting to immediately grab the audience’s attention; for example, a suitable quote or a current reference such as a newspaper article. Nothing is more boring than sentences like “so my topic is” or even worse “it’s lunch break soon but I’ll quickly tell you something about my topic”. Ideally, you have prepared carefully for your presentation and thoroughly researched to give the audience important insights. You should embody this from the start. An agenda is optional for presentations with me. If you lack structure in the presentation, an agenda slide will not save you; if the structure is clearly recognizable, the agenda slide is not necessary. Regardless of how you decide — you should never start with the agenda slide! However, it can be helpful to cleverly incorporate an agenda into the layout of the slides.

More important than the agenda is to cleverly use the headlines. These should contain the central message of the slide, so for example “Diversification Reduces Portfolio Risk” is a better headline than “Portfolio Diversification.” Also, make sure not to overload your presentation with content. It’s not about presenting “everything” that you have found and read, but to explain the most important contents and connections to your audience. The book by Alexei Kapterev (2011) provides an excellent overview of how to do this. Although the book is in English, it is written in a very descriptive manner and should actually be mandatory reading for all those who are giving a presentation. The book by Barbara Minto (2008) goes deeper into the structure of arguments. Here, many subtleties are described, so this book is very valuable, but less suitable for beginners and more for advanced users. A clear end rounds off the lecture - ideally, even a rounding off to the opening statement. Here, too, it is important to avoid cliches like “thank you for your attention” or worse “I think that’s what I wanted to tell you”. A simple “thank you” at the end is enough. This sets a clear end to your presentation.

Lecture Content

If your (examination) task is to prepare a specific topic in order to present it to your fellow students, you should care for a tension arc. Essentially, you are telling a story and should present it in a way that the listeners can easily follow. For the matter of [#storytelling](#) as well, in the book of Kapterev (2011) there is a specific chapter with valuable hints and tips. The basic structure you may use for your presentation can vary greatly. Sometimes it can be advantageous to proceed chronologically. In other cases, it may make sense to identify factors and present them in a weighing process. Which specific structure you choose for your presentation should be coordinated with me in case of doubt. Anyhow, it is important that your presentation creates added value and not simply processes facts.

Research Findings

If you are presenting research results from a project or thesis in your exam, the agenda needs to be structured differently. The special requirements for research presentations are described quite accurately, albeit somewhat exaggerated, in the “Writing Tips for Ph.D. Students” by Cochrane (2005). These also belong to my mandatory reading recommendations. Essentially, you should forego a classical tension arc here. Particularly at conferences, time is tight and you cannot exceed your assigned time budget or risk losing valuable discussion time. Nonetheless, the common mistake here is to present the central results at the end. The better structure for presenting research results is to start with the research question or hypothesis and then immediately present the central results. These can then be discussed in more depth afterwards. One should avoid lengthy motivations, literature reviews, or method introductions and instead provide these in an appendix.

During Your Presentation

If you want to convince the audience, you should speak freely and under no circumstances read from text. This looks neither lively nor convincing or confident. Free speaking is also a good means to regulate the pace — very often fast pace and reading go hand in hand. But of course, you should also regulate your pace when speaking freely. It is best to practice your presentation in advance and check if you can handle the time frame. Besides pace, appropriate volume also plays an important role: you should neither speak too loudly nor too quietly. Ideally, you can use volume and pace to emphasize certain passages and not make the presentation monotonous overall. A slightly more relaxed style is good, but be careful not to fall into colloquial language. Also, a important note on time management: the number of slides should give you a sense of whether you can present the content at a reasonable pace within the given time. Plan for at least (!) three minutes per slide on average; i.e. for a 15 minute talk, significantly more than 5 content slides are unrealistic. For group presentations, also think carefully about where and how often to switch. This can have a major impact on the dynamics of the lecture.

It is especially important not to simply recite facts in a presentation. It's always about the *what*, *how*, and *why*; you should explain in an easy-to-understand way and if possible, include concrete examples. So, a sequence of sentences like: “As a reaction to the 35% decline in stock market, the central bank lowered the interest rate from 4.2% to 2.5%. Three weeks later, the fixed exchange rate to the dollar was abandoned. As a result, GDP declined by 12%.” would be awkward. The point is to describe the connections and explain the effects of measures or the associated hopes or intentions, for example: “The stock market crash with a drop of up to 35% shook the confidence in the country's economy. Banks held back their money out of insecurity — thereby risking a credit crunch. Arthur Dent, then head of the national central

bank, therefore decided to lower the interest rate by 1.7% to stimulate investments again. To prevent the collapse of foreign exchange reserves, the fixed exchange rate with the USD was also abandoned.”

It is generally advantageous to include activating elements in the presentation. However, you should make sure that this element also offers real added value and does not serve as pure showmanship. Asking a question to the entire audience that can only be answered by one person or should be answered by one person is not a successful active element.

The location of the presentation is also important. Don't hide behind a lectern, a board or a technical device, but face the audience. Additionally, you should not constantly turn around to the projector image — and possibly even talk to the image instead of the audience. Some lecturers also tend to move back and forth constantly, as if they are trying to evade something. This too should be avoided: Pay attention to a confident stance.

The Slide's Layout

When thinking about presentations, one immediately thinks of the programs that can be used to create slides. However, a good presentation can generally be held without software support, at least a change of media usually has a positive effect on a lecture. A presentation is essentially a talk that may be supported by visual impressions — this can also be done through other media, depending on the argument, e.g. flip chart, bulletin board, demonstration material, whiteboard, etc. If you use software such as L^AT_EX, PowerPoint, or Prezi for your presentation, pay attention to a clear [#layout](#) of the slides. The book by Kapterev (2011) also provides many valuable tips on this topic.

The title slide is of great importance. On this, all relevant information such as title, speaker, date, event, etc. should be included. Clarity and clearness should also be present on the other slides. In general, a large headline should be used and clearly separated from the rest of the slide content; a large company or institution logo is usually dispensable. Also, use a footer. This should include the name of the speaker/s so that it is clear who presented the content afterwards. Additionally, a page number is helpful in referencing the correct slide in case of questions. Slides serve to illustrate your arguments. Therefore, text-heavy slides should be avoided. Diagrams or graphs are well suited for slides; these images must then be labeled accordingly and also be an important part of your presentation and explained accordingly. If text is necessary on slides, such as a definition or statement, the font size should generally not be less than 24 pt. Tables should not be too small and should be limited to essential information. Animations can be an important eye-catcher — but should be used sparingly. Playing audio sounds during the presentation is only a good idea in exceptional situations. Overall, the layout should not be too playful and the focus should always be on the essential. Use the entire slide space — leaving large areas unused due to the arrangement of elements (headline, running agenda, etc.) is usually unfavorable for the audience. Also, consider your color choice. Contrasts that are easily recognizable on a home screen are often absorbed by projectors. The same applies to the font — it is significantly better to choose a sans-serif font for the projector, as it is more legible.

Formalities

A thorough preparation also includes the formal requirements. First and foremost: the citation rule applies of course also in presentations! You must clearly indicate on the respective slide where you obtained all contents, graphics, tables, etc. In the end, you then prepare a complete list of references. In the handout, all borrowed materials must also be properly identified and a list of all references must be provided at the end. A handout is an important element – use it;

for example, it is convenient to write notes under the slides and print them together with the slide on one page. Make sure to submit the documents to me in a timely manner: typically this will include a handout (as *.pdf) and the slide set (usually *.pptx). It is also essential that you label the files correctly: `subject_author_file-description.file-extension` so, for example, for Sheldon Cooper: `Derivatives-Pricing-Cooper_Handout.pdf`.

Finally: Be Prepared

It is important not only to prepare the content of the lecture, but also to test the technology. Get familiar with the facilities at least a day before and make sure you can connect your computer and log in. This will give you enough time to get the right cable. For example, if you use the presenter mode in PowerPoint, make sure you can access it in the lecture room. Also, check if you have all the necessary cables, a power supply, a power bank if necessary, replacement batteries for a presenter or other necessary items and that all batteries are fully charged. Take the presentation as a backup on a USB stick and store the presentation files online in your cloud.

In the end, Douglas Adams' advice from *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* applies: "***Don't panic***". Godspeed!

References

- [1] John H. Cochrane. "Writing Tips for Ph.D. Students". University of Chicago. 2005. URL: <https://www.johnhcochrane.com/research-all/writing-tips-for-phd-students>
- [2] Alexei Kapterev. *Presentation Secrets: Do What You Never Thought Possible With Your Presentations*. Wiley, 2011.
- [3] Barbara Minto. *The Pyramid Principle: Logic in Writing and Thinking*. Prentice Hall, 2008.