ERE Presentation Guide

1. Organization / story arc

a. Every presentation has a story arc. In the simplest form:
   i. you introduce a problem or question = *introduction and literature review;*
   ii. you explain how you will investigate that problem or question, justify your approach, and describe key factors = *methodology and applications;*
   iii. you relay what you found = *results;*
   iv. you discuss the implications of your results = *discussion and conclusion;*
   v. and you thank and cite your sources, co-researchers, proofreaders, technicians, and mentors = *references and acknowledgments.*

b. To refine your presentation within these parameters, first consider your imperative: what idea or results do you most want to convey to your audience, and what information will they need in order to understand and accept your argument? (If you have no apparent goal for your presentation, your audience will disengage immediately.)

c. Then, shape your presentation around the story you want to communicate. If you are introducing a new, more efficient methodology, your introduction and results sections might be brief. If you are tackling a controversial subject, you might need to explore the literature in detail and contextualize how your project fits into the ongoing discourse.

d. Don't abandon your story at the end. At minimum, you should discuss how your research deepened your understanding of the subject. If your analysis has implications for a specific community or the field at large, discuss these as well. Recap the critical points in your project, explaining what has been resolved and what is still left to investigate.

e. Finally, go back over your presentation draft, and make sure that each "plot" point leads logically to the next. In theory, a presentation should lead an audience forward just as a good piece of fiction does.

2. General rules

a. When introducing a complicated idea, break it into logical chunks, and check your audience to gauge if they are following each step.

b. Avoid using unnecessary jargon. Explain any technical terms that are outside the common knowledge of your audience. Translate any acronyms, including those for government institutions, e.g. NOAA, BLR, CAISO, etc.

c. Cite images and content appropriately, both throughout your presentation and in a concluding slide for References.

d. Don't expect to reformat your entire research report into a presentation. Rarely do you have sufficient time in a presentation to cover everything that is explored in your report. The story that you tell will be governed somewhat by the time available to tell it.

3. Slides

a. Text
    i. All text must be visible from the back of the audience. The material on your slide doesn't "count" if it can't be read. This includes text within tables and in captions.
    ii. Generally, avoid all-caps and italics as they can be difficult to read at a distance.
    iii. Use a sans-serif font.
    iv. Always employ high contrast between the font color and the background.
    v. Avoid using font color alone to convey important ideas (e.g. highlighting a key result by using a different font color), as audience members may be unable to differentiate between colors.
    vi. There should be no background graphics or texture behind text. Text should either be dark and sitting on a light or white background, or white and sitting on a dark background. (Avoid extensive use of full-bleed color slides, as these can lead to visual fatigue.)
    vii. Use short, clear sentences or phrases on your slides. (Don't ask your audience to read complex content while you speak!)

b. Images
    i. Before using "artistic" backgrounds or other decorations, consider whether they lend clarity to or distract from your presentation.
    ii. All images should be relevant to your project.
    iii. All images must be credited, and you must have permission for their use unless they are in the public domain or Creative Commons. See the ERE Style Guide for citation guidelines.
    iv. All image captions must be in a legible font size and color. Keep captions to a reasonable length. Follow the ERE Style Guide instructions for Tables, Figures and Graphs.
    v. All images must be of high quality. Do not include fuzzy or pixelated images.

4. Speech

a. Speak as clearly as you can, at a moderate pace. Don't race the clock.
b. Face your audience as much as possible, rather than the screen.
c. If you are asked a question, repeat that question to the room before answering it. (This is not required in seminar situations, but is absolutely necessary in larger classrooms or lecture halls of any size.)
d. If there is no microphone, you will need to project to the back of the room. If you tend to speak softly, practice filling the room with your voice.
e. Always use a microphone if one is provided. If you are using a mic and have technical difficulties, stop your presentation and ask for assistance -- many technicians avoid interrupting a presenter, but without a mic, some members of your audience may be excluded.
f. If you have vocal limitations, be aware that you can always ask Disability Services and your faculty member in advance for assistance. Your faculty member may also be aware of technical solutions.

5. Accessibility

a. You should always assume that your audience may include people who are visually, hearing and mobility impaired. Aim for high accessibility in your presentation, and be flexible to the specific needs of your audience.

b. As you progress through your degree, you will gain confidence with these critical communication skills. We don't expect that you came to college knowing best practices for accessibility -- and furthermore, accessible technologies continue to evolve in exciting ways -- so don't hesitate to ask your faculty members or Disability Services for guidance.

c. What is *required* of the presenter?

   i. Audio

      1. **Transcripts should be provided for all audio files.** If this is infeasible because of the length or complexity of the recording, ask your faculty member how to proceed.
      2. **Videos should be captioned.** Captioning includes both speech transcription and a description of what is being shown. YouTube typically offers an auto-transcription; you will need to confirm in advance that the auto-transcription is correct, and either make edits (if it is your own video) or provide them in written form for your audience.
      3. Hearing impaired audience members may require a copy of your presentation script with which they can follow along, and/or for an American Sign Language (ASL) interpreter to accompany your presentation. The first is your responsibility as a presenter; the second will be provided by Disability Services. If you are speaking extemporaneously and will not have a transcript available in advance, check with your faculty member about how to proceed. If an ASL interpreter participates, make sure to respect their space on the stage, and to thank them at the conclusion of your presentation.

   ii. Visual

      1. **You must always describe the content and implications of each image that you put on the screen.** If an image (figure, graph, or table) is necessary to understand your argument, then you must explain it.
      2. Visually impaired audience members may also require a copy of your presentation with embedded audio captions. Audio captioning is available in both PowerPoint and HTML, and allows users to hear audio descriptions attached to each image.

   iii. Mobility

      1. **Consider mobility when planning for participatory exercises.** Speak with a faculty member if you are not sure how to include all of your audience in your presentation activities.

d. Accessibility should be your default

   i. Following best practices for accessibility makes your presentation stronger for ALL audience members. For example:

1. There is little value to showing a graph but not explaining how it works and why it is relevant. In fact, a poorly addressed graph will distract your audience, while they spend time trying to connect the graph to your argument. By explaining the meaning of your graph, you not only include your visually impaired audience, but you help everyone better interpret your results.
2. Captions allow your audience to understand speech that might be too fast, poorly recorded, or muddied by ambient sound. Captions help compensate for inadequate speaker systems. They also facilitate understanding for audiences who do not share the same language fluencies.

ii. You will not always know who has impairments. Imagine that you are standing at the front of a room, and deciding whether or not to use a microphone. You call out, "Can everyone hear me?" and after the enthusiastic response, you put the mic away. But who didn't respond, to let you know there was a problem? The people who didn't hear you in the first place.

iii. Accessible technologies are increasingly mandated in academic and professional contexts. Your skillful use of these technologies (a) allows you to reach a wider audience, (b) communicates respect to and is inclusive of your whole community, and (c) makes you more employable.

6. Dress and manner

a. Dress

i. Avoid wearing shirts with graphics, logos or slogans. While engineering is not a particularly fashion-oriented profession, you won't want your clothes to distract from your presentation by advertising your favorite bar or television series. Sweats and cutoffs are not advised for most presentations, and hats should generally be removed (excluding, obviously, those worn for religious or health purposes).

ii. It's a good idea to get practice presenting in clothes that you will need to be comfortable wearing in the workplace. Typically, we don't see as many suits or short skirts in engineering as one might in the business sectors; instead, slacks or a comfortable skirt, and a button-down, clean t-shirt/top, or sweater, will usually suffice. Practical dresses that allow for movement are fine.

iii. Consider the room in which you will present. If a room's temperature runs hot, dress accordingly. Likewise, you may want to practice moving around the front of the room. What clothes feel comfortable to you there?

b. Manner

i. We each use a variety of social dialects every day. As we change environments, vocabulary that is appropriate in one situation may earn us discomfort in another, *even if many of the same people are present in both places*. In most STEM* presentations, you will want to avoid using slang or expletives -- the former, because not all of the audience will understand you, and the latter, because you risk offending audience members or appearing unprofessional.

(*Note: some humanities classes actively use swearing and controversial terminology in an effort to address the social powers of language. “Bad language” isn’t necessarily bad... it’s just rarely well received in STEM, in part because it carries a high emotional value that may distract from the research.)

ii. Avoid the use of derogatory comments, gendered roles, racial or class assumptions, or anything else that might convey a lack of respect to members of your audience or the larger community.

iii. Remember to thank the people who made your presentation possible -- including classmates, faculty, lab technicians, and family and friends. A little grace goes a long way, and it is a demonstration of your confidence and your capacity to collaborate and accept assistance.

7. Technical preparation

a. We have all watched presentations slide downhill because of a technical failure. Some of these moments are beyond your control (e.g. a faulty sound system at a conference, or losing your Skype connection during an outage), but there are some glitches that you can resolve by strategic backups.

i. Have a copy of your presentation on a flash drive AND send yourself a copy of your presentation via email and/or put it in a google drive folder. (The flash drive is key. Don’t *plan* to access your presentation online, which would require logging in and out between presenters. However, if the flash drive fails, you want to have alternative access.)

ii. **Test both copies.** If you are launching into YouTube from PowerPoint, make sure that the links are live and are beginning at the correct start time. Confirm that any audio files or visual models work as well.

iii. If possible, practice your entire presentation in the same room and using the same equipment that you will use for the actual presentation.