

Francesco Caselli's presentation guidelines

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This is a short <<how to>> for presenting in the macro workshop – though the basic principles extend to any seminar or conference presentation. Inevitably they contain a considerable element of personal taste. On the other hand they are based on close to 20 years of observation of <<what works>>, both as a presenter and as a member of the audience, so I think you are unlikely to get too far wrong if you adhere to them.

The question. Every paper is the answer to a question. Your first task in the presentation is to make sure that everyone in the audience is absolutely clear about what that question is. You need to achieve this within the first 5 minutes of the talk – in most cases much earlier than that. The question must appear in your slides, i.e. your slides must feature one (and ideally only one) sentence ending in the punctuation mark <<?>>. Ideally this sentence will appear in your first slide. Occasionally however you will need to give some (very brief!) background before you can get to the question, particularly if your question is about explaining a fact, and you first need the audience to know that fact. In these cases the question may have to appear in the second slide. I can think of no circumstances in which it is justified to have your question appear after the second slide.

Motivation. Your next slide should answer the question <<who cares, and why?>>. Normally the answer is some combination of: (i) this is some hitherto unexplained important economic phenomenon which we should understand; (ii) the answer to the paper's question could have significant policy implications; (iii) a certain fact is inconsistent with existing theories so the paper solves a puzzle. You should not need more than one slide for the motivation. If you do it is a bad sign.

Your answer. A seminar is not a detective story, where you keep the audience in suspense until the end. On the contrary, you need to convey very early and very clearly what is your answer to the question you posed at the beginning. Again, this should be contained in one slide and one slide only.

Intuition/strategy. For theoretical/computational papers, this is the slide where you informally convey the basic intuition for the result that you have announced on the previous slide. For empirical papers this is the slide where you give a sense of the setting and the identification strategy. Again no more than one slide on this. In fact the <<answer>> and the <<intuition/strategy>> can often share the same slide.

Literature. This should not be a long list of papers and names that are somewhat related to your work. The point is to tell the audience about (i) what are the existing answers in the literature to the question the paper addresses; and (ii) why you are not (fully) convinced by the existing answers. One slide (at most).

All of the slides above typically use words only (and sometimes some graphs). Use words very sparingly. If you fill a slide with words you are either saying <<don't listen to me, read the slide>> or <<don't read the slide, listen to me>>. Slides and talk should be complements, not substitutes.

Rest of the talk. The rest of the talk is where you get into the meat of the paper. Here are some guidelines for this part. (i) List all your assumptions clearly and explicitly, and be prepared to explain

why are they reasonable, and what role do they play in delivering your results. (ii) Skip most of the derivations. Your audience won't possibly be able to follow all the derivations in detail and you don't have time for them anyway. The only exception is when a particular step in the derivation delivers useful intuition/insight in what is driving the results. (iii) In presenting your results, use equations very sparingly. Once again, the criterion for including an equation is that it helps you talk the audience through the key insight/mechanism of the paper. If an equation does not generate additional insight, don't include it. (iv) Don't fill your slides with equations. For a 60-minute (30-minute) presentation, do your utmost to stay below 15 (8) equations.

Overall number of slides. Approximately 99% of presenters show up with far too many slides (and far too many equations). Then they are forced to rush through the second half of the presentation, and make choices on the fly on what to cut out. The result is chaos, bad choices, and a puzzled audience. It is far better to have thought carefully about what is essential, and what is not, in advance, and prepare the slides accordingly. My golden rule would be 15 (8) slides for a 60-minute (30-minute) presentation.