

How To Give a Lunch Talk

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Presenting Is a Skill to Develop Now

- Being able to communicate your ideas clearly in a presentation is a crucial skill for economists.
 - Crucial to get good feedback.
 - Crucial on job market.
- But it is underemphasized
 - Not something we teach enough.
 - Not something students spend enough time on.
- You should devote enough time and attention on how you communicate your ideas.
- Identify your key take aways and emphasize them clearly and repeatedly.

Outline

1. How To Prepare For a Talk
2. Crystallization, Intro, and Conclusion
3. The Meat of the Talk: Clarity, Brevity, and Transitions
4. Guidelines For Slides, Tables, and Figures
5. Speaking, Answering Questions, and Getting Feedback

How To Prepare 1: Spend Enough Time

- **Spend at least a week crafting, practicing, and honing the presentation.**
- Students frequently do not spend enough time on the talk.
 - Improving your results by ε , running another robustness test or extension, etc. is *nowhere near* as important as communicating your ideas effectively.
 - Yet students spend more time on these types of things and give the talk short shrift.
 - Give the talk the same level of care, attention to detail, and thought that you gave the research!
- You're going to compete with others for economists' attention on the job market. Learn how to capture that attention now.

How To Prepare 2: Craft the Talk

1. Identify what is important

- Key take aways.
- What in model / data / results you *need* to show.

2. First Draft of Slides

- Less than one slide per two minutes you have allocated.
- *Every talk is a new talk.* Assume your audience has no idea what you are doing and has forgotten your project.

3. Revise Slides

- Every bullet needs to be *excellent* and *essential*.
 - Does someone smart but not in my field need to know?
 - Does an expert in my field need to know?
- Be clear and precise.
 - Eliminate buzzwords and vague terms.
 - Eliminate excess words. Rewrite in half as many words.
 - Work to reduce clarifying questions.

How To Prepare 3: Practice

- Practice Out Loud.
 - Practice speaking concisely and clearly.
 - Record yourself (audio or video) and listen.
 - Then try again in half as many words.
 - Slides can remind you what to say, but are not a script.
 - Get to the point where you know what is coming on the next slide so you can look at and talk to your audience.
 - Practice the full talk timed. Have time milestones. Know what you will skip if you miss them.
- Practice Questions
 - Anticipate most difficult and common questions.
 - Practice answers and practice again in half as many words.
- Practice With Friends (After Practice Alone)
 - At least 3 days before, do a practice with several friends.
 - Printout slides, simulate questions, get feedback at end.
 - Have them record time every few slides on printout.

How To Prepare 4: Getting Good Feedback

- If your audience follows and is “on board,” you will get the “right” kind of questions and feedback.
 - Constructive.
 - Ideas for what to do, what is really important, etc.
- You do not get good feedback (and are giving a bad talk) when you lose the audience.
 - Lots of “clarification” and confused questions.
- For a lunch talk in particular, *make sure your audience is always on board.*
 - Hard because you are knee deep into the project and everything makes sense to you, but may not make sense to your audience.
 - When making slides, ask yourself if you can be clearer.
 - Key part of practice with your friends is to make sure you learn when they are confused and not on board.

Crystalization

- What are the main things you want your audience to take away from your talk?
 - Should be at most three things.
 - This is your headline result, key intuition, etc.
 - This is your paper's abstract or 30-second "elevator pitch."
- Should be the "through line" in your talk.
 - Outline of talk builds around, emphasizes, and ties back to the take aways.
 - Hit take aways *repeatedly*.
 - Audience should leave thinking "I learned X, Y, and Z." Should be *exactly* the three things you intend.
- Transitioning from details of research to stepping back to identify what is truly important is hard but essential.
 - Work at it!

The All-Important Introduction

- In 3-5 slides, an intro should:
 1. Introduce and motivate your question.
 - Be clear why question is important *on its own* rather than “in relation to literature.”
 2. Explain how you address your question.
 3. Preview results and economic intuitions (main take aways).
 4. Set up the rest of the talk so audience knows structure.
- Needs to be *outstanding*. Intuitions, results, headline numbers, et cetera need to be *crystal clear*.
 - Sometimes a figure will help.
 - Do not want clarifying questions or “question prompts.”
- Formal outline of rest of talk is matter of personal taste. But should give sense of where you are going.
- Skip the lit review slide (but have it to skip over), incorporate key cites into intro.
- Don't apologize at the start. Of course it's preliminary.

The Conclusion: You Determine the Aftertaste

- Often the conclusion is an afterthought that gets lost as people are rushing to finish.
 - **It should not be.**
- The conclusion is your only opportunity to control what the audience leaves the room thinking.
 - Make the most of your last word.
 - Hammer your key take aways home and why your question and answer are important.
- Finish on a high note.
 - Do not end on something weak.
 - Too often people put in “extensions” or “future work” that is muddled and vague that ends on a low note.
 - Okay to have what you will do next in a lunch talk, but put in the thought to make it a high note.
- Don't say “I hope I've convinced you...” What if you haven't?

The Meat of the Talk: Start With an Outline

- Your talk and paper are an *argument* with a *logical structure*.
 - Start by outlining this structure for yourself.
 - Should always be in service of and tying back to main takeaways.
 - Ask yourself:
 - Is this the right order? Why is 1 before 2?
 - How does each section flow to and build on the next?
- Then build slides off of outline.
- Often helpful to come back to conclusion and intro after you have the outline and again after you have a full draft.

The Meat of the Talk: Clarity and Brevity

- What is the clearest way to communicate your research?
 - Often it is a well-crafted *figure* or a single *key equation*.
 - Is there another way to draw a figure that is clearer?
 - Can you rewrite an equation to be more intuitive?
 - Can you label the pieces of the equation or use color to bring out intuition?
- Too often students put too much into slides.
 - Put *only what is essential for the audience to know*.
 - Everything else can be on backup slides, which you should have links to in your presentation.
 - Fine line: Do not want lots of clarifying questions, but also do not want to give audience too much to chew.
- Examples:
 - Most of the time, skip how you solve your model.
 - Skip standard parameter choices, functional forms, etc. Only show what is novel or unusual.

The Meat of the Talk: Notation

- Not clearly introducing notation is a common pitfall.
 - Make sure you state things clearly.
 - If there is a parameter that will be important, flag it verbally.
- Throughout the talk, try to refer to notation by what it means rather than by its greek letter.
 - Example: Your slide can say σ , but say “inter-temporal elasticity of substitution” out loud instead of “sigma.”

The Meat of the Talk: Transitions

- Transitions between sections are *absolutely critical* to keep your audience engaged and on the same page as you.
 - Remember your talk should have a clear outline. Transitions are between these sections.
- Remind your audience what you have shown them, explain what you will do next and why.
 - Transitions are “signposts” that help audience follow your argument and provide structure.
 - Transitions help you drive home your main take aways.
 - They help you not lose your audience.
 - Also good opportunity for questions.
- Rehearse transitions.
 - Some people add a slide with new section name just to remind them to verbally make a transition.

Guidelines For Slides

- Titles
 - Titles should give main take away of slide in one line.
 - Some people like always having a subject and a verb.
 - Bad: “Results,” “Simulations,” “Theorem.”
 - Good: “Sticky Prices Cause Quantity Adjustment, Non-Neutrality.”
- Blank space and clarity:
 - Do **NOT** fill slides to the brim.
 - White space is important.
 - Brevity and clarity are important. Forcing yourself to be concise to create white space is crucial.
- Indentation helps draw eye to what is important.
 - Single blocks of text lose your audience.
 - Use indentation, centering, etc. to highlight importance.
- Use active voice rather than passive.

Guidelines For Figures and Tables

- A presentation is not an eye exam.
 - Make the text large, the lines thick, colors distinct.
 - Figures should not have too many lines or be too complicated.
 - Tables must be small enough that they are easily understood from the back of the room.
- Tables and figures must be self explanatory, but you still **must** explain them.
 - Do not want questions about them.
 - But *a/ways* explain to audience, verbally saying what each axis is and what each line is.
- Use consistent colors, line styles, etc. across your presentation.
 - Often useful to flip between two figures with two different calibrations, or to add a line to a figure for emphasis.
 - For this, need to have axes, colors, etc. be consistent.
- It's a matter of personal taste, but use of the default figure settings in STATA or Matlab can appear careless.

Speaking Style

- Speak slowly and clearly.
 - Be economical with your words.
 - This is new to your audience, and they need time to digest.
- Talk to your audience.
 - Stand to audience's left of slides.
 - Do not pace, move around a lot.
- Use your voice to emphasize what you *want* to emphasize.
 - Do not be monotone.
- Record yourself and notice your flaws as a speaker.
 - Maybe you speed up or raise your voice at the end of a sentence. Maybe you use too many words. Maybe you are monotone.
 - Know your weakness and watch for it.

Speaking Style

- Be friendly and collegial but authoritative.
- Be an academic.
 - Do not oversell. Be the first to criticize your own research.
 - You are dispassionately trying to find the truth. Do not say “I did this to get my results.”
- Signpost, signpost, signpost.
 - You need structure and to remind people where you are in the overall argument.
 - Transitions are key.
- Be courteous and willing to engage.
 - Give time to ask question, then after you answer make sure they are satisfied and return.

Time Management

- Poor time management can ruin a talk.
 - The point of your slides is not to get as far as you can.
 - Your talk is a whole package.
 - Often your last slides are more important.
- Keep an eye on the clock.
 - Identify where the clock is in the room. Sometimes it is at an odd angle to the speaker.
 - Carry a travel digital clock if you want.
- Know what you are going to cut if you run low on time.
 - A complete contingent plan.
 - Time improvisation, which is sometimes necessary, requires that you organize your talk ahead of time to have natural breakpoints.

Answering Questions

- Make sure you understand the question.
 - Feel free to rephrase the question to make it sound better and push it farther.
 - Do not be afraid to ask for a clarification of a question.
- Take your time to respond.
 - Quality of response matters more than speed
- Give your best answer first.
 - Lead with your strongest response. Do not bury it!
- Be concise, clear, and precise.
 - Talks go bad when you give a bad, rambling, or imprecise answer and get into a back and forth with a questioner.
 - No pronouns.
- Think outside your model or your data.
 - Answer as an economist not someone bound to your work.
 - Especially true in job talks.
- Do **not** treat questions as the start of a confrontation.

Getting Feedback

- Write down every question you get in a talk.
 - Have a friend take notes.
 - May even want to record your talk.
 - Put in well-formatted document that you constantly update.
- Make a practice of writing down answers, then trying to rewrite in half as much space.
 - By the time you are on the market, you will have an inventory of questions and answers and be much better prepared.
 - If you hear a question you have not heard before, you should only screw it up once.
- Talk to friends and advisers *the same week* when it is fresh in their mind.