

Presenting your research or research proposal.

Most PhDs or early career researchers make a complete mess of presenting research ideas or resultsⁱ. They assume that the idea is to impress with the amount of work done and to convince the audience of the reliability of the results. It isn't. What the presenter wants is constructive feedback that will improve the project. What will impress is a clear, concise presentation focusing on, rather than avoiding, problem areas and an open attitude towards criticism and suggestions.

Some advice

You:

Face, and look at, the audience. (If you can, get a screen in front of you. If not, have a print out.)

Smile and enjoy it – it doesn't matter if it goes wrong. This is just a training ground. Better to experiment and get it wrong here than elsewhere.

Ask questions – and leave space for an answer – but move on if you don't get one.

Don't defend yourself against criticism. If you disagree, or cannot understand, suggest you talk about it later. (Something like "Yes, that's an interesting idea. I'll see if we can incorporate it." should allow you to move on.)

Take control of the presentation – if interruptions are getting in the way just say you want to move to the crucial results/problem/etc.

Your presentation:

Make sure the technology works and your slides are loaded in advance.

Maximum number of slides = minutes \div 2. (I use minutes \div 3.)

If you are nervous about only having 10 slides or so you can have backup.

Don't overload slides – only include what you need for your explanation.

Don't bother with an outline of the presentation.

Go easy on special effects, photos, emojis, etc., but figures and graphs can be helpful.

Practice - with an audience that will criticize and interrupt to ask questions.

If the chair suggests you move on, do so.

One possible outline

It will be really boring if you all follow this but have a look and see where you want to use it and where you prefer to do something different.

1. **Title**, co-authors etc. The title is best expressed as a research question. Use this opportunity to explain why you are interested, why it is (academically and/or practically) important, what you are trying to do, and where you need help/suggestions. This is your "elevator pitch"ⁱⁱ and should not be on the slide – it is a chance for you to talk to, and establish a rapport with, the audience.
2. **Research Question and Setting**. Here you could use Libby boxesⁱⁱⁱ if it helps. But whether you do or not you should explain how you are trying to see if X impacts on Y, but your proxy for X is x and for Y is y and you will need to control for the impact of Z₁...Z_n. It would

help here to explain the “channel”: why and how, in practice, you think X affects Y. Even if you are doing qualitative research much the same questions will apply.

3. **Research Method.** Here you can describe your sample, how you collected data, your approach to analysis, key equations or calculations if any. This applies even if it is a research plan rather an outcome. Again, you don't need to have everything on the slide – the audience may well ask for more details, which you can give verbally. If you are doing empirical work you may want to talk about your “identification strategy” – how you can be sure X affects Y – or you can say you are coming back to that in the problems section.
4. **Results.** This should be your main (most interesting, not all) results but not pasted from the tables in the paper – that often leads to illegible slides. Graphs often help the audience interpret results. (You may want back up slides with more results which might help deal with questions, descriptive statistics, explain robustness tests etc. or simply give you something to talk about should you start running out of material – although this rarely happens.) If you are simply pitching a research project, you may not have results yet, though you would typically have some descriptive statistics at least.
5. **Problem(s).** This is where you deal with the crucial element and it could easily be more than one slide. It might be issues of method, data availability, strange results, reservations about prior papers, etc. If this is a proposal it could be here where you explain alternative approaches you are considering, or problems you can see with the research but are unsure how to deal with.
6. **Contribution.** How does your work extend our understanding and how does it differ from previous studies? How might it lead into future research and/or impact on practice?

I haven't suggested a prior research section, but that content could appear anywhere. Certainly, in method, contribution, and results you might want to cite other papers. I don't think you need the citation to be on the slide, but you may prefer to include it as a reminder.

Total Slide Count. If I only have one problem slide and one set of results I have six slides. Realistically it is likely to be seven to ten, but I cannot remember ever running out of things to say. It is easy to have a few back up slides but if you finish early that gives the audience more time to make suggestions – which is what you want.

ⁱ The typical doctoral colloquium presentation consists of 20+ slides dominated by background and literature review. We often find we are 15 minutes into the 20 allotted and still have not touched on the researcher's own work. Even if someone wants to make a suggestion from the floor the presenter is facing away, reading from the screen, and neither sees the questioner nor leaves any space in the rapid-fire presentation needed to get through all the slides. The audience is bored and disengaged and cannot contribute to the research because it's crammed into the last few minutes.

ⁱⁱ An elevator pitch is the explanation of your research which you should be able to give to a famous, but patronizing, old git who has asked you to explain it in the two minutes you share the lift. If you can interest them it might be very useful, but composing a pitch also makes you think about what is important in your work. (See Three Minute Thesis.)

ⁱⁱⁱ Libby Boxes.

