

## **Giving Presentations in Ling 480/812 -- Some Hints**

For many of you this will be your first presentation of academic material to others, and so you might be nervous. Try to keep in mind that this is a *supportive* environment, where all the other students are also presenting for probably the first time. And they will want to help you succeed. They may ask you questions about the material, but these are just questions of clarification, wanting you to say a bit more about the material. They are not aggressive questions designed to make you look silly or stupid. The experience you get from this presentation will (I hope!) help you in your further academic (and non-academic) presentations.

### **Structure:**

You have already told the rest of the class what article you will be reporting on, you have given them a copy two weeks in advance, and you have told them which 15-20 pages of the article they should read. Nonetheless, you should *not* assume that they have all understood it as well as you do. You should therefore make sure that you are *explaining* the material of the article. You might even pretend that no one else has really read the article, and that you have to start from the beginning in explaining it and the general topic.

You have 30 minutes to give your presentation, but at least five (or more) minutes should be reserved at the end of the presentation for questions from the other students and your answers. You should practice (out loud) at least once so you know that you will not go past the time limit. During your presentation I will notify you when you have only five more minutes to go before question-time.

### **Content:**

Start with your name, and say what article you are reporting on. (Give author's name, title of article, and where it was published.) If you know some other information about the author (such as: the author has written many articles on the same general topic, or is in a large research group devoted to studying this topic, etc.), you can mention that also.

Say what the general topic of the paper is, in broad terms. This is intended just to set the background. For example, you might say that it is about children's ability to see the difference between mass and count terms, or about the formal semantic differences in generics between English and Turkish, etc.

Say how the author wants to approach this broad topic -- for example, by videotaping children playing with toys, or by interviewing the children's mothers, or by looking at web documents that are translated between English and Turkish, or by living with natives and learning their notions of generics, or by logical analysis, etc.

Most articles will mention some of the earlier investigations of the topic and what their conclusions were. Often these are followed by criticisms of the earlier studies, and reasons to look further. You might mention some of these, but not too many because you don't want to get bogged down and you don't want to use all your time doing this background work.

You will want to explain what the author mainly did, and what conclusions/results were attained. You might also want to evaluate these conclusions to see whether you think whether they are justified, in light of what the author did. One thing in particular you might consider is whether the author's results really did show that the earlier studies were wrong. (Perhaps the earlier studies can be seen in a more favorable light, and maybe it was only that the author was being unfair to the earlier ideas). Since this presentation is mainly a report on what was in the article, it is *not* required that you engage in this critical material. But if you had any of these sorts of questions, they would make your talk be better.

You might actually *like* what the author did, and think it is very convincing. If that is the case, then you might think of further uses of the results or further uses of the author's method. And you could mention these at the end of your presentation. Generally, authors like to make claims about where their work could be used in the future and what sort of further investigations would be relevant. You might wish to mention these too, in your presentation.

### **Style:**

A template for any talk is: the Introduction, the Body, the Technicalities, the Conclusion. When time is short, you should make the Technicalities section become shorter and shorter. In any case, do *not* get bogged down in technical details. The articles by Parberry (which are available from the course webpage that you got this document from) give many good suggestions about how to organize your talk, even though the two articles are about giving research talks rather than article presentations and are about Theoretical Computer Science and Membrane Biology rather than Linguistics. He gives such strategies as:

Define the problem under discussion. Quickly and in a few sentences.

Motivate the audience. Why is this an important problem? Why is it non-trivial?

Introduce any necessary terminology, but keep it to a minimum.

Provide a brief guide to what topics your talk will cover.

Give a brief overview of the major results

Explain the significance of the results

Sketch how the main result was proved (emphasis on *sketch*)

Give a conclusion that reminds people of what you have been talking about

Indicate that you are finished (E.g., say "Thank you. Are there any questions?")

Do *not* go overtime

### **Other hints on presentation:**

Maintain eye contact with your audience. Spread your attention throughout the audience instead of concentrating on any one person or group. (Especially, don't just talk to the instructor!) A good strategy for beginners is to choose a few people at random in different places in the audience, and look at them successively.

Control your voice. Speak clearly and with sufficient volume. Don't speak in a monotone. Try to avoid information-free utterances (like "Umm, Er, Ahh, Uh, etc.)

Project energy and vitality without appearing hyperactive. Use natural gestures. Try not to remain rooted in one spot, but avoid excessive roaming. Don't get between the projector and the screen. Point to the screen rather than to your computer, when trying to draw attention to something.

Relax about your language difficulties. If you think you are not completely fluent in English, don't worry about it too much. (You might get a native speaker to look over your overheads or PowerPoint slides). Most academics are accustomed to, and tolerant of, foreign accents and modes of speech. And they certainly do not think less of you for it!

Try not to get anxious and nervous. It is a good idea to spend some 10 minutes looking at your slides alone sometime within a few hours before your talk. And, don't worry too much about the expressions on the faces of the audience. After all, maybe the person ate something bad earlier in the day, and it has nothing to do with your talk! If you panic, pause and close your eyes, and take a few deep breaths to calm yourself. And then continue.

## **Visual Aids**

In Linguistics most researchers use handouts that contain the example sentences that will form the evidence for the analysis to be given. In Linguistic Semantics it is somewhat more common to use an overhead projector or a PowerPoint-style presentation. Transparencies can be prepared by hand, or by photocopying a printed page onto transparency sheets.

Do *not* put too much on a page!! Seven points is all the human brain can hold! Many of us can't even hold that much at once. (PowerPoint helps here, since you just can't get that much onto one of their slides). But *definitely avoid* having more and more material on one sheet of overhead transparency!

And keep the type-size large! If it is from printed copy, 18-point is the *minimum* size for presentation. Anything smaller cannot be seen when it is projected. I recommend using bold face everywhere. If you are using PowerPoint, you can use colors to emphasize things.

Do *not* put everything onto slides. Your slides are supposed to be an *adjunct* to your talk...it should *not* be a transcription of your talk. You should *not* find yourself in the position of giving a talk that is merely a reading of your overheads.

Allow 1.5 to 2 minutes for each transparency. Since you are talking for 25 minutes, do not expect to use more than 10 or 12 slides.