



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR HONORS STUDENTS PRESENTING AT HONORS RESEARCH SYMPOSIA AND ACES

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Presentation of the fruits of your Senior Project is a requirement for the Honors degree, and for that reason alone this endeavor should be taken seriously. Moreover, for those of you who will be doing formal presentations after graduation (whether in graduate school, professional school, or the world of work), it is an opportunity to hone your public speaking skills and to learn to establish a presence before an audience.

The following remarks are inspired by more than a dozen years of moderating and judging Honors Research Symposium sessions and some four decades of moderating professional presentation sessions in my academic field. They are designed to assist you in planning your presentation, irrespective of your academic major.

1. **Arrive early and prepared, and look the part.** You should be dressed professionally (business or at least business casual). *Jeans, shorts, T shirts, flip-flops, etc. are not appropriate attire for a scholarly presentation.* They send a message that you are not particularly invested in your presentation. Such a message is not lost on your audience.
2. **Anticipate technical problems.** Have at least two ways to access your PowerPoint presentation (e.g., thumb drive and Web). The general rule governing all technology is this: *If something can go wrong, it will.*
3. **Plan to be present for the entire session in which you are scheduled.** It is a courtesy in academic and other professional conferences where such presentations are made that **all** presenters arrive before the session begins, and remain in the room to hear **all** their colleagues' papers (at least until an intermission). It is rude, not to mention disruptive, to breeze in for your paper only and to leave as soon as you have delivered it. HRS and ACES are, among other things, celebrations of student achievements. You will find the variety and depth of your fellow students' research very impressive, just as they will yours. Participation in these symposia means more than presenting your own research.
4. **Start on point.** The most common—and most pointless—first sentence spoken in HRS and ACES presentations is “My name is so-and-so and the title of my presentation is such-and-such.” Even worse: “*Like he said*, my name is so-and-so and the title of my presentation is such-and-such.” Inasmuch as the session moderator already will have introduced you and your topic to the audience, and since this information is likely to be projected on the screen as your PowerPoint title slide, it is unnecessary to repeat it. Your name and the title of your presentation are, moreover, listed in the program. Everyone knows your name and why you are there. Do not waste time; get right to the business at hand. Consider beginning with a greeting (“Good morning,” “Good afternoon,” e.g.) and tell your audience in brief and simple terms what problem you have investigated, how you got interested in the problem, and/or what your goal is.
5. **A plausible first slide** will include the title of your presentation, your name, and the name and department/program of your faculty mentor. A plausible final slide will acknowledge your faculty mentor and any other persons (e.g., other professors, teammates/classmates) who contributed to the success of your research. You may wish to finish up instead with a slide that lists, in bibliographic format conventional in your discipline, the main works you consulted and/or referred to in your presentation for those inclined to go further into the topic.

6. **Do not abuse the power of PowerPoint.** There is an enormous and ever-growing bibliography on this topic: particularly recommended is Edward Tufte's illustrated essay, *The Cognitive Style of PowerPoint*, second edition (Cheshire, CT: Graphics Press, 2006). Word or graphic spin-ins, jarring text/background color and pattern combinations, cutesy, unnecessary audio, cluttered templates, **and especially slides jam-packed with text or tabular data**, will put your audience's teeth on edge immediately. Twelve slides for a 12-minute presentation is probably about as many as your audience will be able to absorb. The best PPT slides are simple and austere. No slide should have more than a few sentences of text or bulleted items. The font should be simple and easy to read, and the point size should be sufficient so that everyone present can read it (16-20 point at least, and a sans serif font is recommended). Never show a long paragraph, unless you have good reason (e.g., a detailed textual analysis). Strive for a simple, clean Zen look. You might consult Garr Reynolds's presentation tips at <http://www.garreynolds.com/Presentation/slides.html>, which distills a great amount of wisdom. His website is a good place to start to hone your PPT skills. For an early (2001) but useful critique of PPT, see Angela Garber's essay titled "Death by PowerPoint": (<http://www.smallbusinesscomputing.com/biztools/article.php/684871>). Prezi has been appearing in recent years in HRS sessions as an alternative to PPT. It is your choice whether to use it, but many viewers find it vertiginous.
 7. **Face your audience and do not read your slides.** Acknowledge your audience. You want them to focus on what you say, not what they read—otherwise you could simply distribute handouts of your slides at the door, and there would be no reason for anyone to attend your presentation.
 8. **Try not to be chained to a written text**, although it is acceptable to cue yourself with notes. Your audience will respond better to a relaxed, conversational style of presentation than to a paper you read word for word. In order to do this well, however, you will need to
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 9. **Practice, practice, practice.** Doing so will additionally enable you to extend an important courtesy to your co-presenters, namely to stay within the time you are allotted. Do not put yourself in the HRS and ACES session chairs are instructed to stop your narrative at twelve minutes. It is always better to come in under the time limit than over, since that will leave more time for Q&A and discussion. Practice frequently, with a stopwatch, to make sure you stay within your allotted time. Practicing also increases your familiarity and comfort with your presentation. Knowing your material well makes it easier to edit on the fly if there is a time crunch. Keep in mind that if there are equipment problems, the talk must nonetheless go on. Working without a net is never easy, but it is very impressive to the audience.
 10. **Proofread your slides** for misspellings, typos, mistakes in syntax, etc. It is a good idea to have someone else do it, too (and slides that are not packed with text will make for easier proofing).
- NOTA BENE:**
There is never an apostrophe in the word "Honors" when it modifies "College."
11. **Seek critiques.** Your faculty mentor will likely be very experienced in doing research presentations. Do not be shy about asking him or her to critique a dry run. Your classmates should also be willing to give you feedback on your presentation.