

Instructions for Student Presentations in English Linguistics

During your studies, you will inevitably have to deliver a talk in front of your instructor and/or a group of your peers. This serves the goal of helping you:

- develop your public speaking skills,
- learn how to communicate complex ideas in a coherent and effective way,
- expand your peer-to-peer communication and team-work capacity,
- prepare for the defence of your final thesis if you decide to acquire a master's degree, etc.

A student presentation will usually be aligned with the general topic of the course in which it is delivered and deploy or showcase the methods of linguistic research and analysis underpinning that course.

The following is a set of recommendations for how to successfully prepare for and deliver a presentation in English linguistics. It illuminates the following aspects of a student presentation:

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1. Types of presentation in English linguistics

The type of presentation that you will be expected to deliver as a student on a given course will be determined by your instructor. In terms of content, a presentation in linguistics can involve:

1. illuminating a **topic** specified by the instructor (e.g. "Spanglish as a Variety of English: Phonological, Grammatical, Lexical, and Sociolinguistic Features"), in which case you are expected to scour relevant linguistic literature for information about the topic and produce a comprehensive and coherent account of the specified aspects of the topic;
2. reporting on an **individual study**, in which case you are expected to familiarise yourself with the given study, break it down and introduce it to your peers in a clear and logical way in class;
3. reporting on your own **research project** in English linguistics, i.e. presenting the scientific work that you yourself conducted or are planning to conduct. In this case, you are supposed to
 - come up with a research question¹;
 - select an appropriate linguistic methodology and a framework allowing you to produce an objective answer to your research question (e.g. linguistic text analysis, corpus research, Conceptual Metaphor and Metonymy Theory, etc.);
 - (collect²), analyse and interpret authentic language data (not reported on in already existing publications);
 - draw with the answer to your research question from your analysis;
 - introduce the whole project and its results in a step-by-step fashion to your classmates in an in-class talk.

2. Structure of an in-class talk

Ideally, an in-class talk should involve the elements specified below.

Element 1: INTRODUCTION

In this section, the student(s) is/are expected to introduce:

- themselves (and their teammates),
- thesis/topic statement of the talk (1 sentence),
- roadmap/outline of the talk (how they will be making their point),
- the rules of audience engagement (i.e. questions at the end or during? Free or guided discussion? Will audience participation be required, e.g. via a quiz? etc.)

¹ Usually, your research question will target the structure, function, use, etc. of either the English language, or one of its varieties, or the English language contrasted with some other language(s), etc.

² In most cases, you will be expected to set the scope for and collect your own language material that will serve as a dataset for your analysis, e.g. 50 tweets with a particular hashtag dating from a particular time or 5 inaugural speeches of U.S. presidents, etc.

Element 2: BODY OF THE TALK

This is the main part of your presentation, in which you elaborate on the matter at hand. It must be noted that the specific contents of this section will depend on the type of the presentation to be delivered (see [Section 1](#) above). With topic-based presentations, this is the part of the talk containing the information that you have sourced from the relevant literature (you can structure the main body of the presentation into chapters and subchapters the way you see fit for your topic).

With study- or own-research-project-based presentations, on the other hand, it is advised to follow the structure below:

1. background/statement of problem (*What was the necessity/motivation behind conducting this/your study?*) + the research question designed to solve the given problem;
2. a **short** review of the relevant literature (if available; citations included; please bear in mind that in presentations of this kind, this is **not** the focus of the presentation);
3. the methodology of the study (including a description of the sources of data) + limitations if any;
4. results and analysis of data (observed tendencies/ patterns; bear in mind that this **is** the focus of the presentation of this kind).

Element 3: CONCLUSION

In this section, the student(s) is/are expected to:

- deliver an **ultrashort** summary of the matters discussed so far, AND/OR
- restate salient/most interesting points of the topic which came to light during research, AND/OR
- provide an evaluation, interpretation of the findings of (own) research and their significance (in study-based presentations), AND/OR
- draw connections between the given topic/study and the course content, AND/OR
- offer questions for further research if any.

Element 4: DISCUSSION

In this section, the student(s) is/are expected to:

- either present questions for discussion to the audience (to be prepared in advance) → guided discussion,
- or take spontaneous questions from the audience and manage the discussion → free discussion.

3. Language

It is important that you adjust your language to the formal context of delivering an in-class talk at an institute of higher education, i.e. a university. It is thus recommended to bear in mind the following:

- you are expected to speak in the formal register; therefore, it is advisable to avoid colloquialisms, such as *you guys*, *gonna*, *really*, *you got it*, etc. as well as flowery language, e.g. *I was flabbergasted by my discoveries*, etc.;
- use complete sentences (consider rehearsing your talk with cue cards to achieve this; however, during the actual presentation, you should try to speak freely and not look at the cue cards);
- utilise professional (linguistic) terms;
- do not read out long passages of written text even if you wrote them yourself; mind the differences between speech and writing³.

4. Timing

In most cases, the instructor will specify a time limit for your presentation, e.g. 20 minutes + 5 minutes for discussion. Make sure to comply with the set time limit, since timing plays a significant role in the evaluation of your presentation. If you are delivering a group talk, it is advised that the talk be rehearsed in advance to ensure equal time distribution between the members of the presentation team.

5. Visual Aids

In recent years, it has become common practice to use PowerPoint or other presentation editors to create visualisations of (selected aspects of) one's talk and, thus, aid the audience in grasping and memorising the talk's content. When creating a visual aid, bear in mind that a presentation:

- is not a protocol of the talk; it need not visualise every single point that the presenter makes;
- is not a note card for the presenter to read off;
- is tailored to the needs of the audience – not the presenter.

Regardless of the type of information that you put on the slides (bullet points, quotations, table, plots, diagrams, etc.), make sure to always⁴ feature the sources of that information on the slides in the form of in-text citations⁵, e.g. (Deignan 2003: 56). The full list of sources should be aggregated into a reference list and featured either on the last slide of the slideshow or, if available, on the handout (see [Section 5](#) below).

Please bear in mind that some instructors require that the visual aid be submitted to them after the talk has been delivered in class. Individual instructors may also treat the visual aid as a factor in the final evaluation of your presentation. If you choose to use a presentation editor other than PowerPoint (e.g. Prezi), please make sure that you are able to save and download your presentation as single file so that you can submit it to your instructor (e.g. with Prezi, this is a paid feature).

³ For more information, see Biber, Douglas (1995). *Variation across speech and writing*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

⁴ Naturally, you need not indicate the source for the statements that are your own.

⁵ To learn more about the structure and formatting of in-text citations and corresponding bibliographical references, please refer to *Style sheet (citation and formatting guidelines)* at <https://www.uni-potsdam.de/de/iaa-dvel/information-for-students>

5.1. Structure of a PowerPoint presentation

In terms of structure, a PP presentation should follow the general structure of your talk (see [Section 2](#) above) and contain the following elements:

1. **An Introductory Slide** featuring
 - The title of your talk
 - Your name(s)
 - Course title
 - DATE!
2. **Outline**
3. **Body of talk (structured as you see fit or in accordance with [Section 2](#) above and featuring in-text citations⁶)**
4. **Conclusion**
5. **Discussion (either a slide signalling the transition to discussion or a list of questions for guided discussion)**
6. [References; although these usually go onto the [handout](#)]

5.2. Formatting and Style of a PowerPoint Presentation

While there is no official set of uniform formatting guidelines to be followed when preparing a PP presentation, the appearance of your presentation should ensue from its goals, i.e. aiding the audience in understanding complex issues by ear and earning their trust in the speaker's professionalism. Therefore, it is advised to make one's presentation as clear, logical and at the same time professional-looking as possible.

A few tips for making your presentation look professional:

- Ascertain that your slides are free from errors (spelling, punctuation, grammar).
- Ascertain that your slides are legible (even from the back row) and not overfilled with text.
- Number your slides.
- Keep headings consistent.
- Introduce clear transitions between individual sections.
- Use animation sparingly.

6. Handouts

In most cases, alongside your presentation you will be expected to prepare a handout, which is to be distributed among the audience members. A handout serves as a record of your talk and offers the audience an overview of its structure and contents. In the context of a student presentation, the instructor may ask you to submit a handout of your talk some time before the date of your presentation

⁶ See Section 4 above.

in order to be able to track your progress and make sure that you are moving in the right direction with your research. You should always pay attention to your instructor's presentation guidelines and, specifically, their preferences regarding the handout.

A handout:

- features the main points of your talk + occasionally, also extra information that is not included in the talk/the PP presentation (if you wish to share the extras of your research with the audience);
- follows the structure of your talk;
- features charts, graphs, illustrations, examples, data;
- contains a full **list of bibliographical references** to the sources mentioned in the talk.

7. Presentation Preparation Checklist

I. Preparation Phase:

- Researching the topic
- (Conducting an independent research project: data collection & analysis)
- Devising an outline of talk
- Preparing visual aids (e.g. PPP)
- Preparing a handout
- (Submitting the handout to instructor, receiving feedback)
- Rehearsing content and timing
- Printing the handout out for distribution

II. Action Phase:

- Giving the talk