Preparing the Interim and Final Presentations

These items form a general guide based on guidelines produced by various departments. While the information contained is generally applicable to all presentations, some departments may have slightly different requirements. Students should refer to their own department’s current guidelines, or ask their supervisors, for more specific information.

Your supervisor is the primary authority in all matters related to the project and assessment tasks.

Getting Started
Purpose of the presentations
Interim:
  • to report any completed preliminary work
  • to receive feedback and guidance on your plan for the next semester
Final:
  • to describe your research project
  • to communicate your findings
  • to show that you can communicate effectively in spoken as well as written mode

Consider your audience:
  • What do they want to know?
    Interim presentation: the problem, how you are approaching it, what you have achieved to date, what you plan to do next
    Final presentation: what you did, why it is important, how you did it, what you have contributed to the field
  • How much background knowledge do they have?
    What do they need to know?
    What do they already know?

Consider what information you needed in order to understand the project.
Keeping these points in mind, consider how much time you should allocate to each of the following:

Interim Presentation:
- Topic and context
- Research problem (motivation)
- Project aims
- Methodology
- (Work completed to date)
- Research plan for next semester

Final Presentation:
- Topic and context
- Research problem (motivation)
- Project aims
- Original work (method, results, discussion)
- Outcome/contribution/recommendations

Key aspects of effective presentations
1. Clear structure
2. Effective visual aids
3. Professional delivery techniques

1. Clear structure
Like all English communication genres, an oral presentation must have an Introduction and Conclusion. The structure of the body of the presentation structure may differ according to the focus and direction of the project.

Below are samples outlines for the Interim and Final Presentation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interim Presentation</th>
<th>Interim Presentation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Introduction</strong></td>
<td><strong>Introduction</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Problem/Motivation</strong></td>
<td><strong>Problem/Motivation</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Aim</strong></td>
<td><strong>Aim</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Preliminary experiments</strong></td>
<td><strong>Methodology</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Method</td>
<td>- Literature Review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Results</td>
<td>- Data Collection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Discussion</td>
<td><strong>Work Completed</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Contribution</strong></td>
<td><strong>Research Plan</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conclusion</strong></td>
<td><strong>Conclusion</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The important point is to organize your presentation so that it develops logically from the audience’s point of view.

**Introduction:**
- Introduce yourself
- State the purpose of the presentation
- Introduce the project
  - topic in context
  - motivation
  - aim/s
- Outline the presentation structure

**Body:**
- Present clear sections in logical, developmental order
- Use graphics rather than text in slides whenever feasible
- Keep to the essentials; do not waste time digressing
- Clearly announce the topic of each section
- Clearly mark the transition between sections

**Conclusion:**
Provide a clear, positive ‘take away’ message.

**Interim presentation:**
- Briefly recap your achievements to date (what you have done)
- Summarise your aims for the second semester (what you will do next)
- Emphasise your expected contribution to the field

**Final presentation:**
- Briefly recap what you have achieved
- Acknowledge limitations
- Recommend improvements or further work
- Emphasise your project’s contribution to the field
Linking the parts of a presentation
In a good presentation, the speaker outlines the structure of the presentation at the end of the Introduction. The speaker then reminds the audience of the structure throughout the presentation by making clear links between sections and by announcing the Conclusion.

Example 1

**Introduction**
Today I’m going to describe how I plan to …
My aim today is to explain … and show you …

My presentation has 2 parts. Firstly,… In the second part,…

**Section 1**
Let’s start with …
So that covers …

**Section 2**
Now I’m going to introduce …
So the key features are …

**Conclusion**
To sum up,…
In conclusion,…

Example 2

**Section 1:** First, I'll outline my method.
*Let’s start with the key features…*

**Section 2:** So using this method, I obtained some rather surprising results.
*Let’s first look at the survey results…*
*Thus the key results were … and …*

**Section 3:** The data I gathered points to some very interesting findings.
*The first implication from my data is that …*
*The second implication is …*

The human attention span fluctuates, so it is necessary to remind the audience regularly where you are in your presentation.

Question time
An otherwise effective presentation can be undermined if the presenter cannot answer questions clearly and confidently. Prepare for question time as carefully as you prepare the rest of your presentation.

- Allow the appropriate amount of time. Check the assignment guidelines.
- Anticipate and list the questions you are likely to be asked.
- Prepare answers. Having a slide ready will make a good impression.
- Ask for clarification by paraphrasing the question: “Do you mean…?”
- Recognise “I don’t know”. Never try to bluff; your audience will know you do not know the answer.
How to say “I don’t know”:
“I’m afraid I haven’t considered that yet because... “
“That’s an interesting question, but it wasn’t within the scope of this project to investigate that.”
“I can’t answer your question right now, but I will find out and get back to you.”
“I wasn’t aware of that technique. I would be very interested to learn more if you have the time.”

2. Effective visual aids
- are simple and clear
- contain one main point per slide
- communicate their message at a glance
- may have a BRIEF one sentence summary line to give the main idea of the slide
- contain only one graph or other figure

Results

What is MAGS?
- MAGS is a computer model to measure and predict algae growth in water storage areas
- The storage area is divided into sub-areas based on depth and drainage
- Allows for variations in projected rainfall and temperature
- It is based on existing and predicted climate data

Never copy sentences from your written report into your slides.
Never divide a paragraph into dot-points for a slide.
3. Professional delivery techniques
An effective presenter comes across as confident and enthusiastic. To achieve this you need:
- animated voice
  - loud enough to be heard at the back of the room
  - clearly pronouncing each word
- natural body language
- fluent delivery
- plenty of eye contact

Maintaining eye contact
When we are nervous, it is difficult to maintain eye contact. Our eyes are drawn to the computer screen, the projection screen or our notes. However, if we do not maintain eye contact with the audience, we will lose them. It is important not to be dependent on notes; you should know your material so well that you need only glance at your notes or the screen occasionally.

Developing fluency
Speakers who cannot find the right words and ‘ummm and ahhh’ are tiring to listen to. There is only one way to develop fluency (smooth, articulate, relaxed delivery). Practice until the words come easily.

The only effective way to practice for a presentation is:
- aloud
- with visuals
- in front of a mirror at first, then your family and friends
- over and over again until you are fluent

Language Focus: using precise, professional language
Many interesting projects lose impact by being presented in overly casual or vague and imprecise language. The Introduction is particularly susceptible to this problem as this is when nerves are usually at their worst. Plan the words you will use to introduce your project, so that you avoid meaningless sentences such as:

“Today I’m gunna talk about my project.”

Today I’m going to describe, explain, outline, demonstrate…
...how I plan to address the problem of…, overcome a limitation in…, improve…
...by developing, adapting, applying, devising, analysing, modelling …
...a new design, system, model, simulation, algorithm, method for…

Resources
Engineering Online Resources:
  - Reporting your work in oral presentations
  - Reporting the 4th year project

Language and Learning Online: Oral Presentations