Presentation and writing tips for junior researchers

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These tips are based on my own experience. At the end of the day, you need to make sure that things work for you. Suggestions are welcome

Presentation tips

- *Structure:*
  - Motivation: Keep motivation of topic and research questions brief and to the point (ideally, one slide, two slides max!)
  - Main Results: Then one slide with main results (Focus on high level results, don't get lost in details. The audience will punish you with distracting questions!)
  - Literature: Have one slide with literature (and ideally a logical grouping, rather than just a list), but don't waste time on this. EVERY PhD student presentation (at all university I have ever been) wasted too much time on this. For short presentations (<1hour) I typically say: "In the interest of time, I will skip this slide for now and come back to it after I showed our main results"
  - Main analysis (ideally, you should be here after 5-8 minutes.)
  - Robustness / Extension (you likely won't have time to show this in short presentations, but keep it as a backup)
  - Conclusion
- *Formatting: (see presentation template as LaTeX or pdf)*
  - Professional graphs (Easily accessible graphs are often useful to illustrate ideas!)
  - ZERO typos and grammar mistakes (have it professionally checked!). Famous people can make mistakes. Alas, most of us aren't.
  - Large font size.
  - Not too much content on one slide, no unnecessary line breaks (I find it extremely visually unappealing if a bullet point becomes two lines and especially, if the final line only has one word (see below in red, for a bad example!)
- *Presentation style:*
  - Speak slowly and clearly
  - Try to be excited about your topic (non-monotone voice) without sounding too excited
  - If you are not used to public speaking, practice MANY, MANY TIMES (in particular if your English is not so good). Useful benchmarks for presentation skills are Alex Edmans, see his tips online, or Kelly Shue. I don't necessarily think everyone is able to present as clearly as them, but don't settle for bad, boring presentations from the get-go.
  - Know the content of all your slides without delivering them as if you memorized them

- *Common mistakes:*
    - Getting stuck on some details of the motivation or the literature slide and then rushing later on. Instead, keep the motivation as precise and concise as possible without getting anyone hung up on details and focus on YOUR results.
    - Rushing through (too many) slides. Always speak slowly. It is more important that people get the main idea of what your paper is about rather than showing extension exercise 8.
    - Do not assume that every faculty member knows every paper you know. The profession is extremely segmented. Very few papers are common knowledge to both asset pricing and corporate finance people (e.g., CAPM, Trade-off Theory, Black-Scholes). Assume a trained economist without detailed knowledge of papers in the field as the average audience member (and yet, be ready to convey what is new to the one or two experts in the room)
        - **Example 1:** I once talked to a famous professor at the University of Chicago assuming he knows the ″Rothschild-Stiglitz insurance model.″ I kind of made it sound like ″of course, you know the model like any decent economist . . . ″ Then, I got lost in details in my relative contribution over that paper. Eventually, I noticed he had no idea what I was talking about as he did not even know the original ″Rothschild-Stiglitz insurance model.″ I never heard about that model again in any Finance seminar, but I simply assumed it is public knowledge since I just learned about it in the Information Economics class.
    - Use of excessive algebra and non-standard notation. Algebra is often useful in the paper, but can go horribly wrong in presentations, especially when the notation is not immediately obvious (you can′t expect anyone to remember a definition stated three slides earlier)
    - Not discussing the presentation with your advisor (and other faculty members in the field) in advance.
    - Only talking to nice people (say, Per). It is often very useful to talk to the harshest people. Most research ideas are bad. The earlier you know the better.
        - **Example 2:** I deliberately talked to Anil Kashyap before my job market presentation as he was one of the toughest guys at Chicago, who could derail your entire presentation with smart comments. If you talk to them before your presentation, they may feel like they contributed something to your work, or at least, won′t repeat the same comments.

Write-up tips

- *Structure:* The write-up should largely follow the structure of the presentation. Sometimes it makes sense to work on the presentation first (to feel the flow) before wasting time on wording.
    - Abstract (aim for 150 words max, ideally 100 words or less): What do you study / what do you find? (This is very difficult!)
    - Introduction (6 pages max, ideally shorter, including the literature review)
        - Paragraph 1: Motivation: Why do we care about this topic? Why is it important? Newspaper article or practitioner quote can be useful at times suggesting real-world relevance
        - Paragraph 2 / 3: What is your main question, contribution, and finding (Be concise, focus on the main message, not details)
        - Following paragraphs: More concrete details on setup, empirical identification, data (or, for theory, model setup, assumptions, etc., simple intuition for results)
        - Literature review: Ideally in an intelligent way, i.e., not just paper X does this, paper y does that ... But instead: Our paper contributes to the literature on topic X, such as paper X and Y, by extending Paper X in this dimension and paper y in that dimension
    - Main body:
        - There is no one-size fits all structure, but look at recent, important papers in the literature you are working on.
        - Sometimes it makes sense to delegate extensions to a robustness section as to keep the main results easily accessible (both for theory and empirics)
    - Conclusion: summarize high level take-aways and discuss briefly some follow-up ideas. Cochrane suggests deleting a conclusion altogether. But, this may be a bit extreme for most readers (even though his point is well taken).
- *Formatting:* Make the paper look professional (see posted *LaTeX* template)
- *Common mistakes:*
    - Writing long-winded sentences to sound sophisticated (This is especially common among Germans, who, in honor of Thomas Mann, aim to write sentences, that the reader needs to work though many times, just to understand the basic message, which is often as simple as: ″there is no insight!″ So: keep it brief!
    - Making typos and grammar mistakes. This can be outweighed by a fantastic paper, but why risk the impression of being a sloppy researcher? Have your paper professionally checked!
    - Writing the introduction and the abstract before you finished the main analysis. You cannot condense all your results in the introduction without knowing exactly what your findings are. Therefore, do the introduction at the very end.
    - Assuming you can write up the paper in two weeks. A general theorem is: It always takes longer than expected to write up the paper, especially as a junior.