

SCI 199Y L0161, 2005–2006

Some notes about your class presentation and writeup

Revised for the winter term

1. Please submit a title and “abstract” (blurb) for your talk by the Friday before.

Abstracts will be posted at <http://www.dgp.toronto.edu/~ajr/199/diary/>

Your abstract will be worth about 1 out of the 10 percentage points for your presentation grade.

Avoid sentences in your blurb such as “I hope to answer these and other questions in my presentation”, or even worse, “come and learn all about [topic]!!!” (ok, no one’s was *that* bad).

Make your blurb sound calm and academic, and avoid fluff (such as advertising-type terminology—e.g. avoid saying that things are “new” or a “major breakthrough” unless you really have evidence for that).

Many blurbs were too long for the amount of information in them; don’t pad it out, but rather try to be terse.

Don’t forget to include a title. Your title should be formal and dry, stating your topic clearly.

2. Each student will do one “short” and one “long” presentation, one in each term. Rehearse your talk and aim for about 15 minutes of material (“short”) or 30 minutes of material (“long”). Discussion may take this to as much as 30 or 50 minutes, respectively. We will typically begin with a “long” presentation, then take our ten-minute break, then either have two “short” presentations or another “long” one.

3. Remember the course’s focus on the impact of society upon computing. How did the technology come to be this way? Who are the agents and what are their motives? Are they accomplishing their goals?

4. Research reliability notes:

- Do not cite anything which is itself a course paper/project.
- Be cautious altogether in using material you find on the web. There are a lot of careless thinkers out there, and these days they all have web pages.
- Be careful to cite all source documents and to indicate quotations correctly, both to lend weight to your arguments and to avoid the spectre of plagiarism.

5. You must also submit a written report about your topic (this is a separate 10% item in the course grading scheme). Written reports for “short” presentation topics will be evaluated identically to the written reports for “long” presentation topics—the written report is the same.

While doing research for your presentation, you will want to try to collect all the data you need for your report, as well. However, you may find that issues are raised during your class presentation which you need to do further research to resolve for your written report.

Some topics are more appropriate for a presentation or more appropriate for a written report; the scopes of the two items do not have to be the same.

6. Some presentation advice (some repeated from the fall term version of this document, some new based on experience in the fall):

- Be careful not to go too fast, especially when reading text.
- Be sure to speak clearly, sufficiently loudly, and authoritatively. Some people find they have to shout slightly to speak loud enough even in a seminar room (and *everyone* has to shout at least slightly in a lecture theatre).
- Non-question sentences should avoid the rising intonation used for yes/no questions in English. A rising intonation makes you sound tentative and unauthoritative. Some people find they have to focus on using “assertion” intonation in presentations; it doesn’t come naturally to everyone.
- Don’t read from the computer screen very much; make the notes on the screen be point form, and you speak in sentences. Paraphrase.

(over)

- In general, avoid reading notes verbatim, whether from the screen or from paper. When people read from notes, their tone of voice tends to become less expressive and the presentation becomes less interesting. Make point-form notes for your reference, and improvise most of the words you say, and you will sound much better and your audience will be more interested.
- Make sure you can pronounce all of the words you intend to say! For unfamiliar technical terms, and for people's names, you should speak them out loud for practice while preparing your talk. Many people stumbled on words during the fall presentations, obviously saying them for the first time out loud.
- In fact I suggest a full "dress rehearsal" of your talk. If you are bashful about giving the talk to a peer, give your talk to a pre-verbal cousin or your cat or teddy bear or something. This will show up problems such as difficulty pronouncing words as discussed above, and will also give you a better idea of how long the talk will take when delivering it in class.
- Avoid flashy "PowerPoint" effects. Most of the time you are talking and the screen is static. When you press a key, more text comes onto the screen and this is unusual. Making it even more unusual by having text zooming crazily around the screen or appearing out of order makes the pause for new text interrupt the flow of your talk even more. Also, leave the text on the screen as long as possible; don't make it disappear as soon as you've read it; often your audience will be lagging behind you.
- You should not feel obligated to use "PowerPoint" in the first place. It is one program out of many. You should not feel obligated to present on a computer in the first place. Some presentations in this course in the past have used the chalkboard, an easel, overhead transparencies, or other media. Please feel free to ask me for advice about using other media.
- Justify your claims. Include citations in your talk (you don't have to say them; just have them there, possibly in small print at the bottom).
- If you have too much material, don't go faster. You have to cut something out. This is a challenge particularly for the "short" presentations, which are really a very short amount of time.
- Keep the main point in mind, especially in terms of presenting technical background. Consider your target audience and how much technicality they will understand, and what would be useful and what is useless.
- Consider carefully before including definitions of terms. Technical terms which your audience does not know will need to be defined if used. However, often a superior alternative is to avoid the term. Lists of definitions of terms are usually not appropriate for a presentation of this length. The jargon term is coined in the field in which it is used because it contributes to discourse in that field as a convenient short-hand; however, that does not mean that it will contribute to discourse during your presentation.
- I might be a useful technical consultant for your background research.
- Strike an appropriate balance between hard facts and speculation. Your presentation can be much more interesting if it includes some more outré or speculative statements; but it must primarily be grounded in established facts. Your content must be definitively "non-fiction".