

UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH SCHOLAR PRESENTATION GUIDELINES

Each semester, several undergraduate students from every academic discipline will present their research findings to faculty, staff, members of McHenry County College and general community, and their families and friends. Several of the oral and poster presentations make the URSP symposium an exciting celebration of the undergraduate research culture at MCC.

If you are presenting at this semester's URSP symposium, these guidelines can help you prepare an effective presentation that communicates the importance and significance of your research.

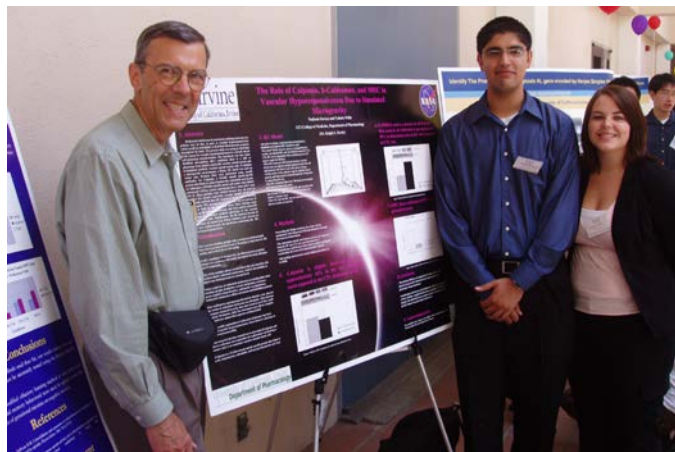
ORAL PRESENTATIONS

An oral presentation is more than just reading a paper or set of slides to an audience. How you deliver your presentation is at least as important in communicating your message effectively as what you say. Use these guidelines to learn simple tools that help you prepare and present an effective presentation, and design PowerPoint slides that support and enhance your talk.



POSTER PRESENTATIONS

A poster lets you summarize your research in an engaging visual format. Effective posters communicate the significance of the research, an overview of how the research was conducted, the results, and the implications of those results. These guidelines help you design a poster to communicate your message clearly.



OTHER PRESENTATIONS

In addition to the traditional poster and oral presentations, we also encourage performing and visual arts presentations. This includes music, dance, theater, drawing, painting, photography, sculpture, and video. We can provide the necessary equipment to play sound and video. A table for artwork displays can also be requested for the poster session.

Research and Library
Kate Harger, Library

PowerPoint Presentation
Pete Lilly, Professional Development, A210

Tips on How to Write a Research Paper
Sage Learning Center, A212

ORAL PRESENTATIONS

You are allotted 15 minutes for your presentation, followed by a 3-minute question and answer period. A faculty moderator keeps track of your presentation time and may also facilitate the discussion.

Please assume that all equipment you requested in your application will be provided, unless we specifically ask you to bring your presentation on a different medium.

Preparing an Effective Presentation

An effective presentation is more than just standing up and giving information. A presenter must consider how best to communicate their information to the audience. Use these tips to create a presentation that is both informative and interesting.

Organize your thoughts. Start with an outline and develop good transitions between sections. Emphasize the real-world significance of your research.

Have a strong opening. Why should the audience listen to you? One good way to get their attention is to start with a question, whether or not you expect an answer.

Define terms early. If you are using terms that may be new to the audience, introduce them early in your presentation. Once an audience gets lost in unfamiliar terminology, it is extremely difficult to get them back on track.



Finish with a bang. Find one or two sentences that sum up the importance of your research. How is the world better off as a result of what you have done?

Design PowerPoint slides to introduce important information. Consider doing a presentation without slides. Then consider which points you cannot make without them. Create only those slides that are necessary to improve your communication with the audience.

Time yourself. Do not wait until the last minute to time your presentation. You only have 15 minutes to speak, so

you want to know, as soon as possible, if you are close to that limit.

Create effective notes for yourself. Have notes that you can read. Do not write out your entire talk; use an outline or other brief reminders of what you want to say. Make sure the text is large enough that you can read it from a distance.

Practice, practice, practice. The more you practice your presentation, the more comfortable you will be in front of an audience. Practice in front of a friend or two and ask for their feedback. Record yourself and listen to it critically. Make it better and do it again.



PowerPoint Tips

Microsoft PowerPoint is a tremendous tool for presentations. It is also a tool that is sometimes not used effectively. If you are using PowerPoint, use these tips to enhance your presentation.

Use a large font. As a general rule, avoid text smaller than 24 point.

Use a clean typeface. Sans serif typefaces, such as **Arial**, are generally easier to read on a screen than serifed typefaces, such as **Times New Roman**.

Use minimal text. Use bullet points, not complete sentences. The text on your slide provides an outline to what you are saying. If the entire text of your presentation is on your slides, there is no reason for the audience to listen to you. A common standard is the 6/7 rule: no more than six bulleted items per slide and no more than seven words per item.

Use contrasting colors. Use a dark text on a light background or a light text on a dark background. Avoid combinations of colors that look similar. Avoid red/green combinations, as this is the most common form of color blindness.

Use special effects sparingly. Using animations, cool transition effects, sounds and other special effects is an effective way to make sure the audience notices your slides.

Unfortunately, that means that they are not listening to what you are saying. Use special effects only when they are necessary to make a point.

Presenting Effectively

When you start your presentation, the audience will be interested in what you say. Use these tips to help keep them interested throughout your presentation.



Be excited. You are talking about something you find exciting. If you remember to be excited, your audience will feel it and automatically become more interested.

Speak with confidence. When you are speaking, you are the authority on your topic, but do not pretend that you know everything. If you do not know the answer to a question, admit it. Consider deferring the question to your mentor or offer to look into the matter further.

Make eye contact with the audience. Your purpose is to communicate with your audience, and people listen more if they feel you are talking directly to them. As you speak, let your eyes settle on one person for several seconds before moving on to somebody else. You do not have to make eye contact with everybody, but make sure you connect with all areas of the audience equally.

Avoid reading from the screen. First, if you are reading from the screen, you are not making eye contact with your audience. Second, if you put it on your slide, it is because you wanted them to read it, not you.

Blank the screen when a slide is unnecessary. A slide that is not related to what you are speaking about can distract the audience. Pressing the letter B or the period key displays a black screen, which lets the audience concentrate solely on your words. Press the same key to restore the display.

Use a pointer only when necessary. If you are using a laser pointer, remember to keep it off unless you need to highlight something on the screen.

Explain your equations and graphs. When you display equations, explain them fully. Point out all constants and dependant and independent variables. With graphs, tell how

they support your point. Explain the x- and y-axes and show how the graph progresses from left to right.

Pause. Pauses add audible structure to your presentation. They emphasize important information, make transitions obvious, and give the audience time to catch up between points and to read new slides. Pauses always feel much longer to speakers than to listeners. Practice counting silently to three (slowly) between points.

Avoid filler words. Um, like, you know, and many others. To an audience, these are indications that you do not know what to say; you sound uncomfortable, so they start to feel uncomfortable as well. Speak slowly enough that you can collect your thoughts before moving ahead. If you really do not know what to say, pause silently until you do.

Relax. It is hard to relax when you are nervous, but your audience will be much more comfortable if you are too.

Breathe. It is fine to be nervous. In fact, you should be—all good presenters are nervous every time they are in front of an audience. The most effective way to keep your nerves in check—aside from a lot of practice beforehand—is to remember to breathe deeply throughout your presentation.

Acknowledge the people who supported your research. Be sure to thank the people who made your research possible, including your mentor, research team, collaborators, and other sources of funding and support.

Keep these Tips in Mind

- Establish early a clear and unifying point.
- Clearly explain the applicability of your research.
- Be sensitive to those outside your discipline.
- Before the Symposium, present to friends and family and invite their feedback. Ask them questions to see if you communicated your points successfully.
- Include or discuss the following, if applicable: Introduction, Methods, Results, Discussion, Conclusion, References, and Acknowledgements.
- Make sure that your presentation material is readable, grammatically correct, and has been edited and proofread thoroughly.
- Cite sources to support your ideas and provide credibility to your findings. Provide credit for text, graphs, etc.
- Always acknowledge your sponsors and mentors.
- Anticipate possible questions and prepare answers.
- Be proud of your work, but acknowledge errors. Explain unexpected results and future research that is needed.
- Always be truthful in presenting your information, and respect your audience.
- Bring a pen and pad of paper for notes and to record names and addresses of contacts.

POSTER PRESENTATIONS

If you are displaying a poster, it will be displayed on an easel set up (you can request additional easels or a table instead if that better suits your presentation materials).

Posters are displayed throughout the day. Please do not remove your poster until the end of the day's activities.

You must be available, next to your poster during the Poster Session, to explain and answer questions about your research. During this time, stand to the side of your display so that you do not block it.

Prepare and practice a short summary speech—no more than 3 minutes—about your project. This is an excellent networking opportunity, so it is important to speak and interact professionally. You will receive lots of feedback and exposure as well.



Designing Your Poster

URSP will cover the cost of the poster. You will need to create a draft of your poster in Word, PowerPoint, Access etc. The final copy of your document needs to be turned in no later than two weeks prior to the URSP symposium.

Poster presentations must use a 3' or 4' (height) by 4' (width) poster board.

Space on a poster is limited, so pick what to present wisely. Your display should be self-explanatory and have a logical flow—viewers should be able to follow the order even if you are not present. The sample layouts at the end of these Guidelines may give you some layout ideas.

Place your title at the top of the poster and make sure that the text is large and clear. Include your name and major, and the name and department of your faculty mentor, in addition to other co-authors.

Incorporate appropriate graphics in your poster. Label or describe any charts, tables, figures, graphs, or photos that you use. Make sure all edges line up evenly.

Before you submit your document, edit and review them and check your spelling. All posters **MUST** be complete and

ready for presentation upon arrival. Incomplete posters will not be displayed.

Does Your Poster Communicate its Message?

Many posters look great but fail to communicate their information clearly. Ask yourself these questions when you are designing your poster.



Is your message clear? Focus on the results and their importance. Avoid overly detailed descriptions of your methods.

Is everything on your poster critical to communicating your message? Remove everything that is not vitally important. Simplify your text by using short bullet points and phrases instead of complete sentences.

Is your organization easy to follow? Most people read from top to bottom, then left to right. Consider numbering your headings to further clarify the flow of information.

Do your headings deliver real information? Good headings by themselves can summarize the main points of your poster if readers are in a hurry.

Is your text easy to read? The poster title should be at least 144 point text, and information about the student(s) and mentor(s) should be 72 points. Headings should be at least 36 point text and easily readable from at least 6 feet. All other text should be at least 18 point and legible from 4 feet.

Is your poster cluttered by too many fonts? Do not use more than two typefaces. Instead use bold, italic and size to set type differently. Times New Roman, **Arial**, Garamond, and **Verdana** are suggested typefaces.

Are your colors distracting? Stick to a simple color scheme (try a couple that complement or contrast with each other, such as black or navy on white). Avoid red/green combinations, as this is the most common form of color blindness.

URSP SYMPOSIUM ETIQUETTE

Are your graphics clear and easy to understand? Avoid elements—such as unnecessary background colors and overly specific labels—that do not add useful information. Explanations should be within or next to figures, not referred to from elsewhere.

Does your poster have a good balance between text, graphics, and white space? Use white space consistently to emphasize separate sections and to keep the poster from becoming too cluttered and difficult to read.

Do readers have to move back and forth to read your poster? Arranging your information in columns makes the poster easy to read in crowded situations, such as the URSP symposium poster session.

Can you talk about your poster without reading directly from it? Be ready to discuss details that questioners cannot read for themselves. People are interested in additional information and your interpretations.



The McHenry County College Undergraduate Research Scholar symposium is not only a forum to present your achievements as an undergraduate researcher, but a celebration of bringing together a community committed to excellence and expansion of knowledge. Be an active part of this community and support your peers, who have also experienced the trials and successes of the research process, by attending their presentations and learning about the research they have completed. Whether you are participating as a presenter or as an audience member for the oral presentations, please show respect and courtesy for your fellow researchers throughout the entire session.

PRESENTATION RESOURCES

These guidelines offer an overview of how to create an excellent oral presentation or poster, and how to present it effectively to your audience. There are many other resources with more detailed information. Here are several good ones available on the web.

Oral Presentations

www.kumc.edu/SAH/OTEd/jradel/Preparing_talks/TalkStrt.html

www.etsu.edu/scitech/langskil/oral.htm

PowerPoint

<http://www.bates.edu/powerpoint-tips.xml>

<http://www.dartmouth.edu/~library/biomed/guides/powerpoint.html>

Poster Presentations

www.ncsu.edu/project/posters

www.hbv2003.slu.edu/poster_links.html

SAMPLE DESIGNS FOR POSTER PRESENTATIONS

Title of Project Name of student(s), Major Faculty mentor(s), Department			
Abstract	Methods	Results	Discussion
Introduction	Figure		References
	Figure	Figure	Acknowledgments

Title of Project Name of student(s), Major Faculty mentor(s), Department		
Abstract	Results	Conclusion
Introduction		References
	Figures	
Methods		Acknowledgments

Graphics	Title of Project Name of student(s), Major Faculty mentor(s), Department	Graphics
Abstract	Results	Conclusion
Background Information	Figure	References
Figure	Figure	Acknowledgments
		Contact Info.