

Western Washington University

From the Selected Works of Javier Berzal de Dios

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How To Present Your Art History Or Humanities Paper (Without Looking Like A Rookie)

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Available at: <https://works.bepress.com/berzal/14/>

How To Present Your Art History Or Humanities Paper (Without Looking Like A Rookie)

Assembled by Javier Berzal de Dios, Western Washington University

Prepping your presentation

- Presentations are written and read. Yes, you will read your entire presentation. Limit offhand remarks to a minimum.
- It takes about 2 minutes to read a 12-point font, double-spaced page.
- Use professional language throughout.
- A solid introduction will have: a thesis (“In this presentation, I explore/argue...”), the W’s (who, what, where, when, why), a road map of the presentation main sections, and a claim for why the subject at hand and/or your research matters.
- If you are presenting a section of your larger research, state it: “This presentation is part of a longer project in which I study x, y, and z. Due to time constraints, my presentation today is focused on z.”
- Remember that not everyone listening is in your field: describe your main artwork(s) and/or explain the technical concepts.
- Introduce quotes by saying “quote,” and end them with “unquote.” You can type those words into the presentation.
- Long sentences work better when reading a text than when hearing them read out loud.
- Addressing the scholarship explicitly is vital. Your presentation should name a couple of scholars who are important in your research. You can also say, more broadly, “scholars have argued that...” or “the scholarship has often maintained that...”
- Always be courteous to other authors, especially if you argue against them. You never know who is in the audience, and your goal is to captivate as many people as possible. Instead of “He is wrong because of x or y,” write “I here present an alternative interpretation based on x or y.” Or position your views in more subtle ways: it is different to say that a scholar has “deftly demonstrated x” than that they merely “argued for x.”
- Have a conclusion that summarizes your presentation and thesis. You can announce that you are reaching the end with “In conclusion...” or “In this presentation I have argued...” That would be a cue to the audience to pay extra attention.
- Since you do not turn in a copy of your presentation, include instructions to self in your text (e.g. “slide change,” “breathe,” “drink water.”) You can print the notes to self in a different color.
- Look up the correct pronunciation of foreign names and words.
- Add page numbers to your presentation in case your paper falls on the ground.
- Present the paper to a friend to practice and ensure your timing.
- You can print your presentation with a larger font to make it easier to read.

Creating the slide show

- Title slide: always have the presentation title and your name. Add the name of your university if you are presenting outside your institution. The title slide can incorporate an image.
- Use one dark background color throughout the presentation. Do not have ornaments or unnecessary elements on the slides.
- Use high quality images. If you can, check the quality of your images on a projector.
- Include ID with artworks in all the slides (artist, title, date; and optionally: museum, size, materials).
- You may use a blank slide if what you are reading is neither here nor there.
- A portrait of an artist/author is suitable if you dwell on biography.
- A period map or city view is suitable if you stress the importance of a location.
- If you are reading a long quote, put it on a slide and take it out when you are finished.
- Visual comparisons and zoomed details are powerful tools, but make sure the audience knows what they are looking at.
- Try to avoid having more than two images on a slide unless you are making a point that requires them.

During the presentation

- Get in a professional mindset: regardless of your level, you are presenting your research.
- Dressing professionally is expected in conferences.
- If presenting at a conference or symposium, you represent your institution.
- You may use your phone to time yourself.
- Try to raise your head and look at the audience here and there. If this makes you anxious, look towards the room’s back wall.
- When you are done, just look up to the audience and say, “thank you.” The audience will then clap. If all the presentations for the day are in a single PowerPoint presentation, press next before leaving the podium.

The Q&A

- In conferences, a Q&A usually takes place after all the presentations in a panel, though in classroom settings each presentation may be followed by an individual Q&A. The person running the panel will tell you.
- Do not argue with the people who comment, even if they are openly hostile or overcritical. Always be polite.
- Write down their comments (even if just to be polite). But really, do think about the feedback when revising your paper.
- You can always say “That’s a very interesting point, I will have to think about that.”
- If the audience does not have questions for you, it does not mean that they did not enjoy or care for your paper.