

RE: FIRST ORAL PRESENTATION: LITERATURE REVIEW

DEAR ...

The TAs and I compared notes to give you some feedback on your presentation Monday. Together we came up with a list of things that you did well as well as some things to keep in mind in future presentations. The purpose of this memo is to help you improve your skills as you go along.

Summary of comments:

As is the case with many multi-authored papers, the paper you chose to present may have seemed disjointed and difficult to follow, but you did a pretty good job of finding the main points. Some things that you may wish to consider or suggestions that we can offer to improve future presentations:

1. Use an outline rather than detailed prose in the notes you use during the presentation. This allows you to (a) speak more freely, without trying to use the exact words that occurred to you when you first wrote them down; (b) vary from your script more easily—you won't feel so tied down with having to say everything that is in your notes in the order of your notes (a single question from the audience may force you to jump ahead or back, and with detailed notes, it becomes very hard to adapt your presentation to such changes); (c) find your place more easily after you've answered a question or described a figure, etc.; and (d) avoid the temptation of "reading" instead of "speaking"—your presentation should sound more like a conversation and less like a recital.
2. Avoid the long pauses. Some people handle moments of uncertainty by saying a lot of "ums" which you didn't do (good for you!), and in general, pauses are preferred over "ums" but long pauses lose the audience. Less detailed, outline-form notes may help overcome this as would a more comfortable understanding of the material you're covering. If you feel comfortable about the subject, you'll feel more free to speak "off the cuff".
3. When preparing your talk, try to anticipate questions that may arise. Thus, they won't catch you off guard and you may even be able to suppress them by answering them before they're even asked!
4. Use tables and figures to present complex information rather than lengthy descriptions or detailed information. Flowcharts of experimental procedures and major results are very useful. Showing a diagram of the pathways earlier in the presentation would have helped us to follow along. Also, once a figure is being projected, point to the parts you are discussing as you go through them

Still your presentation had many good points. We commend your effort to be thorough. It is obvious that you wanted to do justice to the amount of work that was done. This paper encompassed the work of scientists with many different skills—biochemists, molecular biologists, microbiologists, chemical engineers, enzymologists, etc. Trying to give each aspect of the paper a fair airing is a major task. Nonetheless, you gave it the ol' college try and you did pretty well. Your introduction was especially well done. I think you have a good foundation for building excellent presentation skills.

If you want to discuss any of these points, you are always welcome to pull one of us aside during class.