Guidance for Trainees on Ramazzini Presentations

The following brief comments may prove useful to candidates and trainees when presenting talks. They are presented in no particular order.

1) Make the content appropriate and balanced
Keep the content brief and do not spend too much time on one particular aspect of the content. People often spend too long on the introduction and have to rush the rest of the talk.

Do not include too much. It is very tempting to want to tell people every interesting detail of your study, but it is hard for the audience to take in a lot of information. By including too much, you can end up with the audience knowing less about what you did, rather than more. If in doubt, put in less rather than more.

2) Make the presentation enjoyable and entertaining
– Speak to the audience
– Look at the audience
– Present as though you are interested in it.

• Do not read the presentation
  - This is not a hard and fast rule, but it is very difficult to read a presentation and still be interesting. If you do read, make sure you look up at the audience as much as you can and work hard not to sound like you are reading it.

• Do not look at the slides on the screen.
  - It is easy to fall into this habit, especially if you are using the slide as a prompt. However, it means you turn away from the audience, which means you turn away from the microphone and away from eye contact with the audience. There will always (or nearly always) be a computer screen in front of you that you can look at). Use the mouse pointer to point something out if you really have to. This works MUCH better than a laser pointer. If you need to be able to see the slides to remember what to say, take a copy of the slides on paper. But don’t use this unless you really need to.

• Do not use a monotone voice.

• Add some interesting pictures.

• Make a witty aside (not compulsory, of course!).

3) Stick to time
There is no excuse for going over time. Practice your presentation beforehand. If you realise you are running out of time during the actual presentation, do not rush through the rest of the presentation. Skip a few slides and present less.
4) Be careful with your slides
   - Make sure the font is big enough and clear enough (e.g. there needs to be enough contrast between the writing and the background).
   - Do not put too much information on a slide. If in doubt, put in less. If you have a number of dot points on the same slide, consider making them visible one by one, or two at a time. Otherwise, people in the audience will be reading one point while you are busy talking about another!
   - Make tables simple.
   - It is not uncommon for a slide to have a table taken straight out of a paper. Don’t do this. It is extremely difficult for the audience to comprehend the contents of a detailed table. Keep to just a few rows in a table. Use colour or font size or something else to highlight the key point(s) in a table.
   - Keep diagrams and graphs simple.
   - Keep the background simple.
   - Use colours or font size or arrows to emphasise your point.
   - Do not use too many ‘whizz-bang’ effects.

5) Make it simple for the audience to understand the talk
   - Speak slowly. It’s very common to rush the presentation, because people are nervous, and often worried about time. If you are worried about time, TAKE SOME SLIDES OUT.
   - Provide a summary structure at the beginning (“This is what I plan to cover in today’s talk…”).  
   - Explain what graphs or figure show. Don’t just put up a graph and say “As you can see from this slide…”, because the audience will commonly NOT be able to see it and will still be thinking about the graph when you are talking about the next slide. Explain what the graph shows in general, what the x and y axes cover (if appropriate), and what the lines represent. Then SHOW the audience the specific result the figure illustrates.
   - Imagine that you are in the audience. Think about what it would be like to listen to your talk. What would help you to understand; what would keep you entertained?

6) Answering questions
   - Listen carefully to the question.
   - It often helps (but is not essential) to paraphrase the question. This helps people in the audience who haven’t heard it, and gives you a little time to think. For example: “The question being asked is ‘Do I know anything about the subjects who declined to participate?’ Well, we had a little information…”.
   - ALWAYS pause just a moment before answering the question. Gather your thoughts, then give a simple, concise answer whenever you can. The question session is NOT a time to present another part of your talk.
   - NEVER get into a slanging match with a member of the audience. Remember, you have the microphone so you are in control. You can easily say, “I’d be happy to talk to you further about that afterwards…”; or “It looks like we have different views on that, but I’d be happy to talk to you further about that afterwards”.

• Don’t make up an answer or try to fudge it. You should answer the questions you are expected to know something about, BUT if you are not sure, say so.

• Don’t be afraid to say you are not sure. If you are getting yourself tied up in knots, pause for a little while. It’s fine to say something along the lines of “I’m not sure about that. I’ll need to think about it and I’m happy to get back to you after the session.”; or “Hmmm. That’s a good point. I hadn’t considered that. Off the top of my head I’m unsure about the implications, but I’m happy to discuss it with you after the session.”