A Good Journal Club Presentation

www.lhl.uab.edu/researchnb/?p=112

Giving a talk can make anyone nervous and being nervous may make it difficult to communicate clearly or to make a good impression.
Actually, the following suggestions may be all you need.

Content of the presentation

Background/Introduction

The first slide should indicate the title and authors of paper. You should clearly state the study objective/purpose of the study.
What is the key issue or problem that the paper is addressing?
Why is this problem important?
Why should your audience care?
Clearly describe the rationale/previous data or observations for the research question/hypothesis.
Provide both biology background as well as experimental background as required for the audience to understand the topic.
Include key findings and experimental approaches that establish the precedence for the present work.
Clearly explain what the research question/hypothesis is to be addressed.
Is there a current theory in the field, a consensus or a controversy.
Explain the jargon and define the terms.

Methods

I' m hoping the faculty can explain… —NOT! You need to understand methods well enough to:

1. Explain it to the audience
2. Understand the necessary inputs
3. Understand the experimental outputs and what they show
4. Understand the issues, problems, and necessary controls

Use figures from other papers or create them yourself to adequately explain the method to your audience.
Try to be critical of the methods — is it really showing what the author thinks it' s showing?

Results

Show figures and results. For each experiment, first briefly describe why it was done and what the hypothesis is.
Present a clear image of each figure.
Describe what the data represents (e.g., the axes of graphs).
Consider enhancing the figure with your own notes or highlights. Add enough annotation so the figure makes sense to your audience.
Briefly summarize what the results show.
You don' t necessarily need to cover every aspect of the article; focus on what you think is the most important to convince the audience of the quality and conclusions of the work. Did the author interpret the results correctly? Is there another interpretation? Be critical!

Conclusions

Summarize the author' s conclusions. What conclusions did the author draw? Are the conclusions justified from the data? Are they supported by the evidence?
Do you agree with the conclusions? Do the results relate to the research questions proposed in the study objectives? What was the most significant finding of the paper in your opinion and why? Discuss any limitations with the study. How does this study push the field forward? What are the ramifications or implications of this work? What is the impact? Did the authors suggest future directions? What else would you have liked to have seen done? What is your opinion about the novelty, validity, and importance of the findings. At what confidence level should we accept all of this.

General comments

Presentation should not just be an outline of sentences copied from the paper. The ability to communicate orally is important—it is as important as your ability to write well.

Your oral presentation is a sum of your knowledge, skills, attitude and energy. Separate yourself from the authors. Provide objective critique of procedures, interpretations, flaws or contradictions. Answer questions as thoroughly as possible but don't be afraid to say "I don't know." Ask the audience and faculty for expert help.

Keep in mind Dr. Sweatt's four basic types of experiments: block, measure, mimic, and determine. Which does this study use?

What do we expect from the audience?

- Journal club participation is not a passive spectator sport.
- Read the paper before the journal club and try to understand it.
- Ask questions, if you don't understand something the speaker says.
- Participate in the discussions.

Suggestions for giving a good talk

Tell a story, and present yourself. Do a good job worthy of everyone's time! Know your audience and adjust necessary introduction and level of technical details.

Topic selection

A recent journal article on a topic of interest to the audience, preferably within a year, but no more than 3 years old is generally good. You may cover additional and perhaps older papers for supplementary information. Do your homework to make sure you understand it, at least the parts you plan to present.

Coherence and continuity

Create an outline before putting the slides together to ensure coherence. Show the motivation, the approach, results, the physical picture, and conclusions. Add acknowledgement to funding support or technical help as appropriate. Make sure the take-home message is not lost, even if some details are. Provide a good continuity from slide to slide, guide the audience through your story, and refer back to the outline when necessary.

Slide preparation

Limit the amount of text and avoid reading sentences from slides; this is an oral presentation, not a paper.

Bullet points, do not need to be complete sentences, but they should be complete ideas.

Never over-crowd each slide.

Make sure all images and text are large enough to be clearly seen from a distance.

Clearly label the plots: axes, units, legends, and conditions. If using published results, even your own, include references at the bottom of the slide or near the image.

Avoid hard-to-see colors (e.g. light green, yellow, pink). Dark backgrounds can often minimize this problem.

Make sure you thoroughly understand the results you are presenting.

Be prepared to answer questions about everything you show in the talk, and get back on track after the question. Leave out things you are unsure but non-essential or too technical.

You can save those for discussions and potential questions at the end. If you have to address something important yet you are unsure of, acknowledge the gap in your understanding rather than being pressed to admit. It may very well be an open question.

A picture is worth about a thousand words; the right movie is worth more. A live demonstration can be the best of all. However, don’t use animation gratuitously. Proper use of spices (e.g. animation, color, humor) adds flavor, but don’t overdo it. The audience ought to remember you for the substance, not the packaging.

Delivering

Be enthusiastic and energetic to carry the message through and keep the audience awake. To overcome any psychological barriers to speaking in public, practice and practice more. Even if you aren’t actually confident speaking in front of an audience, fake it. Never show weakness! Don’t make excuses for a lack of preparation or knowledge.

Control the pace of your talk, don’t let non-essential questions stop you for too long.

Face the audience you are talking to and not always at the screen. Your back is not

going to get you a job (well, mine won’ t). One slide per minute is a fairly rapid pace. Two slides per minute is quite fast.

Stand up straight and don’ t pace. Hand gestures are OK as long as they pertain to what you are saying.

Keep your hands out of your pockets, and don’ t cross your feet, these are clear signs of nervousness.

If you are using a laser pointer, use it in a controlled fashion. For example, point out something on the slide by using a slow, circular motion around it, not a frantic jittery scribble. If it’ s shaking in one hand, use both hands, a stylus or use a heavy laser pointer.

Avoid using vocal fillers such as: like, um, er, etc. Silence is better and can actually help the pace of your presentation, use it to your advantage by taking purposeful pauses to emphasize points or transitions. Changing the tone of your voice has similar effects.

Speak loudly, clearly, and not too quickly. You will automatically sound more confident and more prepared. There’ s no point in giving a presentation if the audience can’ t even understand or hear what you are saying.

Interact with the audience if possible, but **never insult them.** The audience needs to be “shaken, not stirred”.

Other details

Don’ t let technical issues throw you off balance or ruin a good talk. Before the talk, make sure the computer is compatible with the projector. Make sure you have the right video adapter. Check the resolution setting and refresh rate. 1024×768 at 60Hz is a good choice. Run through all of your slides 1 time before the real thing if possible.

Finally, bring a few extra copies of the article for those who forget. Freshen up before the talk. And, for a long talk, keep some water by your side.