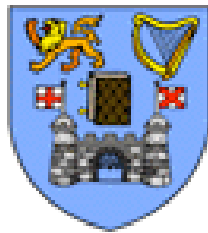


**GUIDELINES FOR  
FRIDAY SEMINAR PRESENTATIONS**

DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE



Trinity College  
University of Dublin

This brief set of guidelines is designed to enable you to use the Friday seminar presentation opportunity to maximum advantage. These presentations can be valuable to you in a number of respects. *For the presenter, the Friday seminar should be seen as an opportunity, not an ordeal.* To get the most out of your presentation, you should think carefully in advance about what you intend to present and how to present it.

### **Professional development**

Presenting papers at conferences or seminars is one aspect of the role of an academic. The Friday presentations are a useful training exercise for presentations in the real world. They are an opportunity to learn how to present a completed or proposed piece of research and to deal with questions about it.

In addition, presentations are an important part of the process of filling jobs. Someone who cannot present a paper well will find it difficult to obtain a job, no matter how able they are in other respects. The Friday presentations are worth taking seriously as training exercises for job presentations. *You should try to treat them as if they were job presentations;* when it does come to a job presentation, the experience gained from this will give you a comparative advantage vis-à-vis candidates who have not been through this kind of programme.

When you apply for grants and/or jobs the likelihood is that you will use staff members of the Political Science department as referees. Staff members writing such references will undoubtedly base their assessment of you partly on how well you have done your presentation(s). It is therefore worth making the effort to do it well!

This implies getting the basics right:

1. *ensure that your presentation takes the right amount of time* (25–30 minutes is about right for the Friday seminar). This requires some degree of preparation / rehearsal to ensure that you don't run out of words after 15 minutes, or discover after 25 minutes that you're only halfway through your material.
2. *use overheads appropriately.* Use a few to show an overview of your presentation, to emphasise major points, or to present data or illustrate a point. If you plan to use more than about 6 overheads, you are probably overusing them. Sort them out in advance; getting hold of the wrong one once might be seen as endearingly amateur and unpretentious, but if you make a habit of scrabbling around amidst a seemingly randomly-ordered pile of transparencies in search of the right one, this is unlikely to convey an impression of efficiency or competence, especially at a job presentation.
3. *present your paper rather than reading it out verbatim.* Use a page or two of notes, on which you can elaborate verbally, rather than a lengthy paper that you

have to plough through in every detail. Try to look at the audience from time to time!

### **What to present**

It is not necessary to have a completed and polished piece of work to present. Indeed, there is little point in presenting something that is completed, because then feedback is of no use to you.

The presentation can take several forms:

1. a piece of work in progress based on preliminary or partial results. Such a piece of work should have a clear question to address, and this question should be made very clear at the start of your presentation.
2. the outline of a research design.

*For students in their 3rd year (or later) of the PhD programme, the presentation should be directly related to your thesis. It should make clear what the thesis aims to do, explain how you intend to go about doing it, and (if you have progressed that far) outline the findings that are emerging. This is not obligatory for students in the 1st or 2nd year of the programme, but if you have a proposal at that stage then it would certainly be in your interests to present it.*

You should be sure to consult your supervisor / adviser in advance to discuss the content and style of your presentation. You should circulate a summary / overview of your presentation (1 sheet maximum) in advance by 3 pm on the afternoon of the previous day. We also recommend that you e-mail the summary to both the [pol-grad-list@tcd.ie](mailto:pol-grad-list@tcd.ie) and the [pol-staff-list@tcd.ie](mailto:pol-staff-list@tcd.ie) lists.

### **How to benefit from the presentation**

If you approach it in the right way, you can gain a great deal from a presentation.

The seminar provides you with the opportunity to draw on the collective expertise and experience of the Political Science department (staff and Ph.D. students), plus visiting scholars. There is no thesis proposal, or work in progress, that will not benefit from the advice and constructive criticism that will be offered by such a group. *The audience that listens to your presentation should be seen as a valuable resource, a kind of large Ph.D. advisory committee that meets once a year for your benefit, rather than as a body to view with trepidation.*

The Friday seminar is a good place to *try out ideas that are not fully developed*. The “cost” of presenting ideas that do not fully stand up is very low; if you have to make mistakes, and everyone does make them, then this is the best environment in which

to do so, rather than postpone this experience to a conference in the big outside world or a job presentation. The audience at the Friday seminar is basically “on your side”—which will not necessarily be true of every other audience that you will face. *Be prepared to take a few risks*, to try out a few new ideas, rather than playing it safe by saying nothing that could possibly be disputed or argued about.

The constructive (or even destructive) criticism that may be offered of your presentation is something to be welcomed rather than feared or resented. Academics present their ideas to others all the time, and when they present their ideas to other academics they know they can expect questions and criticism. *Criticism in this sense amounts to suggestions as to how your work can be made stronger, and you should learn to seek it out rather than try to avoid getting it.* Similarly, when you are part of the audience, you should be prepared to offer criticism of other people’s papers without being concerned that this might be seen as an “unfriendly act”.

Destructive criticism may be harder to accept; but there are times when a proposal is ill-conceived or not properly thought out, and *if a particular approach is simply not going to work out, it is better to be told this bluntly at an early stage* than to discover this for yourself several months later after unfulfilling and time-consuming attempts to make progress. It is helpful to be steered in the right direction, and sometimes this requires being steered away from a path that is going to lead nowhere.

As well as benefiting from the questions and suggestions raised at the presentation itself, you should seek fuller feedback from your supervisor/adviser within a couple of weeks of the presentation. The onus is on you to arrange such a meeting, at which your supervisor will convey to you observations and suggestions that he or she has gathered from those who attended the presentation.