

Recommendations to Students Entering the Henri Seibert Competition

Be sure you are ready to enter into the competition. Of the 57 papers submitted to the Seibert competition at the 1997 meeting in Seattle, less than half were deemed suitable for competition by the judges. The biggest problem dealt with lack of sufficient data and analyses—many papers reported preliminary results. Students should refrain from submitting preliminary results and forthcoming research to a “Best Student Paper” competition. Preliminary results may be presented in poster form, which fosters more discussion than an oral presentation. The following recommendations are intended to aid students in improving the quality of their talks. The criteria presented below are applicable to any talk given at a scientific meeting.

Preparing the Presentation

A. Audiovisual

- Slides should be clear and legible, even in the back of the room. Use large fonts.
- Avoid the temptation to use a myriad of colors. Stick to a few, easily seen, contrasting colors (e.g., reds are hard to see).
- Use only slides that add to the clarity of the presentation. Several slides showing the same thing tend to bore the audience.
- Time allotted to each slides should be sufficient to allow the audience to absorb the pertinent information. Explain each data slide with regard to axes and content.
- Use a pointer (or laser pointer), especially for data slides, but do not overuse the pointer.
- Do not use full data sets in tables. Summarize your data so that tables can be easily seen and comprehended by the audience. Use figures to replace tables when possible.

B. Oral

- Practice, practice, practice! Smooth transitions should occur between slides. NO slide should surprise you by its appearance.
- Speak clearly and use appropriate volume. If you use a microphone, do not turn or walk away from the microphone to address each slide such that your voice fades in and out.
- Often too much time is spent on the methods. Use bullet slides combined with photos (study site/animal, design...) to work quickly through your methods.

Describing your Research

A. Design

- Present your research in a larger context by addressing previous studies (choose 1 or 2 to make your point). Relate your data to the knowledge of your field.
- Clearly state your hypothesis(es) and/or objectives up front.
- Flag techniques that are original to your study (i.e., this study is the first to address this question or to use this technique).
- If you deviate from the original plan of the study, be sure to adequately justify your changes or modifications.

B. Summary of Results

- Present your results clearly. Tables with N and P values are fine (but not necessary) if they are readable. Always indicate your sample sizes.
- Indicate the importance of your results. How do they relate to previous studies? Biology in general?

C. Importance of Study

- Summary slide of conclusions (bullet slide) is helpful in tying together many results.
- State the importance of your study and how your research has added to knowledge of the subject presented. Are your results generally applicable to larger biological questions?

D. Miscellaneous

- No one works in isolation. Be sure to acknowledge (briefly) collaborators and funding agents. This can be done at the beginning or end of the talk, but it may take away from the final message if done at the end.
- Try very hard to limit yourself to 12 minutes. Ability to handle questions is part of the judging criteria. Failure to leave time for questions can leave the audience frustrated.
- Again, practice your talk many times before giving it. You will find that the more you practice, the more confident you will feel and the more polished your talk will be.