Seminar Tips

A. Deciding on Seminar Content

1. Know the audience, their background knowledge and opinions, their purpose and needs.

2. Know what you want to say, what take-home messages you want to leave with the audience.

3. Prepare the seminar so that you can effectively deliver your message to the type of audience you have, not the one you wish you had.

B. Organization

1. Know your subject, understand the content of what you are presenting to a greater depth than you will be presenting it.

2. Organize your thoughts into an outline of the seminar. Start with a bare-bones outline and add flesh. In organizing the presentation, consider the maxim: tell them what you are going to tell them, tell them, and then tell them what you told them.

3. Decide on the key visual aids you will use to present the story.

4. The seminar should contain an introduction, body and conclusions. If you are presenting a seminar on research, you may wish to follow the format used in research papers: an introduction, methods, results, discussion, conclusion.

5. The introduction can include:
   a. an entire outline of the seminar
   b. the broader context of the seminar research. Why it is significant, what is the current thinking.
   c. a clear statement of the questions/objectives addressed by the research (the dirty little secret)
   d. acknowledge coworkers who contributed significantly to research being presented

6. The methodology section:
   a. the overall strategy of the methodology; give only major measurements, what information they will tell. If appropriate, give dependent and independent variables.
b. do not provide too much detail (a common pitfall).
c. for a specialist audience, include enough methods that they learn what you
did, and have confidence in it.

7. The results and discussion section should include:

a. the major findings that address the purposes of the study.
b. the significance of the major findings to science to practice.
c. the domain of the results including major caveats that were not presented
   earlier
d. to the specialist, this section is the heart of a research seminar as it tells
   what we learned of the topic for the first time and what it means to
   previous and future understanding.

8. The conclusion should contain the one to three major conclusions from the study.
   Since this is what you want the audience to remember, present them with clarity
   and if possible visual images. Do not worry if this repeats what was said before.

9. Provide for smooth transitions between sections.

10. Prepare a strong opening and strong closing.

C. Visual Aids Preparation

1. Usual visuals to help explain or highlight a point or to change direction within the
   seminar. Text slides should be short and simple using keyword phrases, not
   verbatim texts of your seminar. Do not put more than six points per slide. Try to
   limit yourself to 15 - 20 words per visual.

2. Usually do not go back and forth between slides and overheads in one
   presentation.

3. All of the text should be readable in the back of the room.

4. Text should not be all capital letters. All capitalized words are harder to read
   because they lack the unique shapes of lower cases. Lowercase is more legible
   than all capitals.

5. Slides should be laid out in a horizontal direction (landscape), not vertical
   (portrait). Text or artwork in a slide should have 3 (horizontal) to 2 (vertical)
   proportions. For overheads, optimal proportions are 4 by 3.

6. Typefaces should be san-serif (e.g., Century, Gothic, Letter Gothic, Arial, Avant
   Garde) for headings and serif (e.g., Bookman, Century Schoolbook, Times New
   Roman, Univers, Helios, News Gothic) for the body of the text below the
heading. Sans-serif fonts slow the reader, and are harder for the eye to identify. Serif fonts have extenders (feet) below many letters that help draw the eye for easier reading.

7. Provide titles for tables and figures. Titles can have a take-home message.

8. Make sure your slides are in the correct orientation and that your overheads are in the correct order.

9. If the same visual is referred to several times throughout the presentation, make duplicates and insert them where needed.

10. Make sure the projector is working and a spare bulb is on hand.

11. Have your own "pointer" with you.

D. Delivery

1. Avoid distracting mannerisms. Remove everything from your pockets before you begin your seminar. Be aware of flailing "pointers." Distracting mannerisms are a sign of nervousness; if you are well prepared, you will be less nervous.

2. Use a pointer only with flow charts and detailed visuals that you need to explain.

3. Use eye contact. Talk to your audience not to the screen. Do not stand in front of the screen--point with the hand closest to the screen so you can face the audience when you are speaking. With overheads, read from the screen, not the projector (unless the overhead projector is not in the way of the audience).

4. Start and close your presentation without a slide or overhead. Have the lights on at the beginning and end of the presentation so you are the focal point.

5. Memorize the first few and last few sentences, but not the entire seminar.

6. Project enthusiasm. Use vocal variety in terms of rate, pitch, tone, and volume.

7. Use notes discreetly, if at all. Number the note cards so that they can be quickly reorganized, if necessary.

8. Do not actively involve the audience through two-way dialogue during the seminar.

9. Explain the content of any figures before you discuss the results (e.g., describe the axis of a graph before you talk about the data).
10. Turn off the projector (or use dark slides) if you will not be using the projector for extended periods. Do not show any blank white screens.

11. Do not make the room too dark.

12. Practice, practice, practice by yourself, with friends, and with your advisor. Give friends evaluation sheets if you wish. Go through the seminar without stopping to get timing.

13. Anticipate potential questions before your presentation and prepare your answers in advance. Practice saying these answers aloud.

14. Answer the question as briefly, yet completely, as possible. Be respectful to questioners, even if their intent is to embarrass you.

15. Restate the question if you believe people did not hear it or if you want to verify the exact question asked.

16. Be well rested.