Paper Presentation Guidelines

On Thursdays, two teams will each present 1-2 papers in a **30 minute** presentation.

What is the goal of these presentations?

There are two primary goals:
- **Enhance the audience's understanding** of the material with an interactive discussion
- **Improve the communications skills** of the presenters

The presentation should reinforce the key points made in the papers. Some papers can be quite long and complex. It's easy to lose the forest for the trees. A good presentation **reinforces the key points** without bogging down too much in the details.

After reading a paper, most of us will have at least some questions. The presenters should aim to **address questions**, prioritizing those asked by multiple students and the ones that are essential to the material.

Class participants who are not presenting can contribute by reading the papers on the earlier side when possible, and sharing their questions on the class discussion board with enough time for the presenters to be aware of them. If there isn't enough time in a given week to read the papers early, audience members should try to walk in with questions ready if they have them. **Please be a good audience member** by preparing relevant questions ahead of time!

Wait, do I need to rehash the whole paper?

No, please don't try to rehash the whole paper! Obviously you can take a PDF manuscript and extract it directly into a series of Google slides. This is derisively described by audience members as **"regurgitating the paper."** People in the audience can tell when you make a presentation this way and they don't like it.

Instead, read the paper with care and **internalize it** as well as you can. Then jot down a few of the key ideas from memory. You can then refer to the paper as you further flesh out your presentation points.

What is the typical presentation format?

Typically group participants will divide up the paper(s) into discrete sections, and assign one person to do each section. Group members will edit a presentation file (typically Google Slides). Each presenter should do an initial draft of the sections they are going to present, and then get feedback from the other group members.

We suggest you **avoid text heavy slides**. All of us are susceptible to this tendency to varying degrees. It's OK to write a first draft of your slides that is text heavy. If you do, make sure to edit them down to the key points. Try to replace text with images when you can. A good rule of thumb is that presentations should contain phrases rather than complete sentences. A second rule of thumb is that one slide should not contain more than one major conceptual idea.

How do we prepare?

Here are some good practices before giving a talk:

- Find **3-4 main points** for your section of the presentation. You want to convey a clear message that will make it easy for your audience to follow along. What are the main takeaways you want them to remember after the end of the talk? Those are your points.
- Each group should **divide its time allotment carefully** between participants. Typically this should be even unless there is a good reason not to. This should include a reasonable time allotment for questions (maybe around 25-35% of the total time).
- Team members should **practice at home** to make sure they are using the allotted time.
- The whole group should **meet together before the presentation to do a dry run**. This doesn't have to be a big deal; if you meet an hour before class on the day of your presentation it will probably be enough. But **please do not go in cold**. Even if you've practiced at home, presenting as a group with an audience has a different dynamic. The other group members act as the audience and the team dry run
- Please remember, **lecture time a precious resource**. We all want to learn this exciting material. The main reason to make a good presentation isn't to get a high grade: it's to do a good job so you and the audience will learn this material!

How do we manage time and audience questions?

- The most common reason presentations fail is **poor time management**.
- How many presentations have you been to where there are three speakers in a 30 minutes segment, and the time consumed is something like 18, 9, 3? How do you think that makes the people at the end whose time it cut short feel? What about the audience? Each group member should **treat their own time budget as a hard constraint**. If you are out of time, skip to the end of your section and give the next person their full time.
- When the presenters have practiced at home (which you will of course!) the most common cause for running over time is **questions that take too long.** How many presentations have you been to that lavished time on esoteric questions about the background material, only to rush through what should have been the main content later? Answering questions is critical to a good presentation. But you have to maintain control over time while you do it. Make the best answer you can in the time available. If it's taking too long, **respectfully say** that you don't have enough time to address the question fully, and would be happy to **take the discussion offline** afterwards.
- When you are in the audience, please try to **ask constructive questions.** This means thinking about whether the question is a good use of class time, and avoiding the temptation to "monologue" or give extended comments. We've all been in the audience when someone else goes on longer than the presenter just to show the rest of us how smart they are. Of course no in this class is going to be that person!