

Reading Group on Financial Markets – Piazzesi, Schneider & Tonetti

The following rules are mandatory.

1. Plan your presentation to leave sufficient time for questions and discussion. This means that presentations should have no more than 16 slides. More than 16 are allowed only if there are a lot of figures. 20 is the absolute maximum.
2. Use no more than 2 slides for the introduction. It is critical to get to the actual work as soon as possible.
3. No more than 1 slide about literature.
4. The model should be explained fully. Explain agents, preferences, technology and equilibrium concept. Assume that you are dealing with a blue-collar audience who is unfamiliar with the model but wants to solve a version of the model right after your talk. Sometimes papers are written in a white-collar, elegant way so that this is hard to do. The value-added of your presentation is to bring the model to those who actually want to work with it.
5. Only put material on the slides that you are actually going to talk about. In particular:
 - a. Only display equations that you will go through in detail. No general definitions, first-order conditions, step-by-step derivations etc unless you explain them.
 - b. No walls of numbers (such as results from 17 regressions where there is only one that is really interesting.) Only numbers that you will actually talk about should be on the slides.
6. When describing regression results, focus on economists not statistics. In particular:
 - a. Describe every coefficient with a sentence like “if x goes up by ... then y goes up by ...” The sentence should remind the audience of the units of measurement.
 - b. Provide a sentence about economic significance. In what sense is the coefficient large or small? For example, clarify the magnitude of a coefficient using summary statistics on x and y.
7. The optimal presentation says (i) why the model was needed (policy? understand the nature of shocks? Forecasting? Etc) and (ii) why the model is a success. In macro, defining success is an art form, because most models don’t do well in matching the data or are so flexible that they can match anything. If the model fails at matching the data, ask whether those are “important moments” – perhaps they are not well measured (large standard errors around them) or not central to the question. If the model can match anything, ask why the exercise is not “empty”. In all cases, push yourself to argue the case of the paper. If you approach the paper in a negative way, you are making it too easy for yourself.

General Points about Slides

- Use a huge font and simple slide layout. Remove any information or visual element that is not strictly necessary for understanding the slide.
- Minimize text: the fewer bullets and the fewer words per slide the better. No full sentences on slides. The slides should support your talk, not replace it.
- Use informative titles for your slides. Ideally, the title should reveal the main message of the slide.
- Stand up, stand next to the screen, and look at your audience. Use fingers to point. No laser pointers. Try not to pace or gesticulate.

- Do not expect the audience to memorize math symbols. To address this, economize on symbols. When talking, if possible refer to the symbols by their economic meaning ('high risk aversion coefficient', not 'high gamma etc.)
- Do not use math symbols that have not been introduced.
- Do not mix model setup and results. The setup/regression design should be explained first, and the results afterwards.
- No mystery novels. When presenting results, do not start with a sequence of steps that culminate in a result. Announce the result (theorem or numerical) first, then explain it.
- When presenting a figure, first say what will be the point of the figure in one sentence. Then state the variables on the axes, and the units of measurements (unless those are obvious from before, which is usually not the case.) Then sequentially describe all the lines in the figure. Finally, reiterate the message of the figure.
- When presenting a table, follow the same basic pattern as with a figure.
- Do not show irrelevant results. If OLS is not your preferred estimator, do not show OLS results, except perhaps as part of summary statistics if those are useful somewhere later. But don't show them as some kind of "warm up" result.
- If you get a good question that you cannot answer on the spot, the optimal reaction may be to say that you'll have to think about the question.