

Instructions for Student Seminar Presentations

Each participating student will give a seminar presentation to the entire class. For undergraduates, seminars should be 15 minutes long with 5 minutes for discussions and elaboration. For grad students, seminars should be 25 minutes, again with time for questions. Seminar topics can be found at our website: queensumexico2015.wordpress.com/seminars/

For Canadian students, we will try to complete all seminars in a time slot that is mutually agreed upon, while Mexican students may give talks after we arrive in Mexico.

Be sure to use Mexico and Middle America as your touchstone for these seminars, but also compare to Canada and other countries to provide context. For example, for taxon specific seminars: How many species are there in Mexico versus Canada? How does each country rank in terms of global biodiversity? Where do most species occur in terms of habitat and geography? Why are some groups so speciose/depauperate? Which families or orders (or other higher-level taxon) tend to dominate in Mexico? What proportion of species is endemic? For other topics, be sure to use Mexican case studies, provide Middle American context, or situate Mexico geographically. For example, for such topics as ecotourism or conservation in agricultural landscapes, be sure to find examples that are Mexico- or Middle America-specific. Be sure to impart rigor to your talk (e.g. not simply a slide show of pretty pictures, but a thorough treatment of the topic that you have been charged with).

Prepare PowerPoint slides and once we sort out the schedule (i.e. who is talking when), please send us the final version of your slides one day before you are to present so that we can collate talks in advance (steve.lougheed@queensu.ca). Order of presentation will be according to the ordered list on our web site. We ask that you provide a one-page summary hand-out and make enough copies for everyone (26 in total – for 22 Canadian and 4 Mexican participants).

Your talk will be evaluated based on: Background & Context, Content & Thoroughness, Visuals, and Presentation style. A seminar evaluation sheet can be found on the course web site and this will provide additional insights into grading. Evaluation will be done both by your peers and by the instructors.

A few useful tips for preparing and delivering an excellent seminar.

Visual aids.

- Make sure to use simple and clear telegraphic prose (i.e. point form).
- If possible redraw graphs and redo tables, again using appropriate font size.
- Label all figures, graphs and graph axes.
- Use a large font size so that all audience members can clearly read the text (typically 24 point or larger)
- Use the same font throughout presentation.
- Be consistent with use of font size, colour and style (e.g. Headings 28 pt. boldface red, Other text 24 pt. Regular black).
- Avoid some colour combinations (e.g. yellow on white, red on green).

- Note that pictures that require a lot of memory often slow down your presentation.
- Avoid complicated backgrounds (simple one colour backgrounds we find allow all visuals to be seen easily)

Presentation

- Keep your presentation within the time limit. You will be penalized for a seminar that is too long. Note that the equivalent of one double-spaced typewritten page usually takes about 2-3 minutes to present.
- Do not read your PowerPoint slides verbatim and make sure to face the audience not the screen or your computer.
- Use the active voice and first person where possible. (e.g. “I think ...” rather than “ It is my opinion ...”).
- Make eye contact as this makes audience members feel involved.
- State your objectives clearly, and maintain the same logical structure throughout.
- Convey your ideas in clear direct sentences (i.e. don't make it sound like you are reading from a book).
- Explain all figures and tables thoroughly.
- Allow sufficient time for people to understand slides and overheads.
- Talk (relatively) slowly so the your audience can follow
- Vary the volume and pitch of your voice to maintain interest.
- Note that in English an upward at the end of a sentence indicates a question.
- Practice your seminar out loud to check timing.
- Try to avoid verbal tics like “ah's”, “er's”, “like” or other distracting behaviours.