Best Practices for Presenting in Class and Labs

Get Your Audience Interested Right Away

• “Motivate your talk” by posing an interesting analytical question or idea at the start of your presentation and referring back to it later on. Don't just dive into the details!

• Don't provide background or summarize the materials at the start (or at all)—instead, set up the analytical focus of your presentation and launch a specific argument.

Framing the Materials

• Go for analytical depth over surface mastery. Your job isn't to show in excruciating detail that you have mastered the material but to challenge your audience on an analytical issue or two and start an in-depth conversation.

• In a typical class presentation (15-20), you'll have time to do no more than two rigorous analytical dives into the material.

• Refer in your presentation to materials previously debated in class or at the lab to jump-start discussion; limit outside materials in your presentation, but if you do use them, make a brief pitch as to why they are relevant to issues at hand.

• One strategy: reverse engineer the presentation to end on an interesting question.

Presentation Hints

• The language of your presentation shouldn't sound like writing. Keep things simple!

• Speak slowly and loudly enough to be comprehended. Pause as needed. And practice!

• Create an interesting visual language for your presentation; choose designs, colors, and images coded to ideas you want to highlight.

• Reduce or eliminate text and math displayed on PowerPoints and have the flow of images speak to the issue at hand as you talk through the details yourself.

• Especially if you haven't done many presentations, don't rely on your ability to wing it! Have something written out in front of you in case you get stuck or draw a blank.