

History Presentation Extravaganza Guidelines and Tips for Presenters

The History Presentation Extravaganza is an event that challenges you to distill some aspect of your research (a primary source, a case study, a seminar paper or chapter) into a short five-minute presentation. Each presentation will be followed by four minutes of questions from the audience. It is strongly recommended but not required that you incorporate presentation software such as Powerpoint or Prezi into the talk. A one-page handout may also be distributed to the audience.

This event provides you with a unique opportunity to practice engaging an audience and communicating the importance and relevance of your work to group of non-specialists. There is no one right way to approach this presentation, as there are many possible ways to present your research and structure a talk. However you choose to approach it, it is important to craft a strategy for how you want to present the information and to set goals regarding what you would like the audience to learn from your talk. Here are some general tips and guidelines to help you prepare.

A strong presentation will do these five things:

- 1) **Contain a clear argument or narrative sustained over five minutes.** This argument will be buttressed by appropriate historical evidence and context.
- 2) **Speak to an audience of educated non-specialists.** Any historian in the room should be able to engage with your material, not just those in your field or subfield. It is therefore important that your talk does not get bogged down in historical details that could confuse the audience and detract from your narrative. For example, do not dwell needlessly on historiography, rely too heavily on jargon or foreign words, or discuss historical events and actors that may not be well known to everyone in the room without providing the necessary context (i.e., World War II does not need explanation, but Peter the Great or the War of the Roses might).
- 3) **Use presentation software in a way that compliments the talk.** This requires selecting images and text effectively to strengthen your narrative and presenting them in an attractive format that does not detract from the presentation itself.
- 4) **Make an appeal about why your work matters and why we should care about your research.** Someone who knows nothing about your work should walk away from your presentation with an understanding of its central questions and conclusions and how it relates to broader historical themes and subjects. The audience may not know much about, for example, Ancient Egypt at the beginning of your talk, but they should leave wanting to know more and with an understanding of how it might connect to their own work.
- 5) **Exemplify engaging and effective public speaking.** This is not a conference presentation. While the quality of your research must be visible and convincing, this first and foremost an exercise in public speaking. As you prepare, think about the structure of your talk: craft a strong, clear introduction that grabs attention; organize the body of your presentation so that it is easy to follow and sustains interest; and end with a conclusion that summarizes the main points of your talk and provokes questions from the audience. Delivery is also crucial: maintain good eye contact, minimize the use of filler words, and be attentive to how your body language may or may not distract from what you are saying.