Inventing Reality Final Presentations
by Douglas Leonard

During “exam week” (May 10 – May 14), Inventing Reality will meet at its regularly scheduled class
times: Monday, May 10, 7:00 – 10:00 PM and Wednesday, May 12, 1:00 – 2:30, in Rm. 333 Cole. However,
instead of listening to me, you will be doing all of the talking! During these class meetings, every student
will deliver a 5 minute presentation, followed by 3 minutes of questions/discussion. The time limit is
necessary due to the number of presentations (29!), and will be strictly enforced.

Stratagy

Giving a five-minute presentation is not easy! What’s more, the variety of topics and presentation
styles are very broad in this class, rendering only the most general advice valid; while what follows is most
relevant for those of you choosing to write a research-style paper that investigates a particular topic, the
basic approach is probably valid for most other presentations as well.

Most likely, your topic is quite involved, and whittling it down to its essential points will be a challenge.
So first, really think about the main things that you have learned while researching your topic, and see if
you can write them out in “bullet” fashion; probably no more than three salient points can be effectively
communicated to the class during your limited presentation time. Armed with this information, then,
begin to construct your presentation. In general, there are 3 parts to a successful short talk:

1. Introduction ≈ 1 minute. Although not nearly as detailed as that given in your written project,
   start out by giving an introduction that is sufficient to place the main findings of your project in their
   proper context. If you choose to show overheads (either Powerpoint or transparencies, see below), it
   is good practice to put the talk title and your name(s) on the first slide (or transparency).

2. Main Findings ≈ 3 minutes. In this section, present the main things that you learned from your
   investiation. It is best to show explanatory pictures or figures rather than lots of words on the slides
   (overheads): you explain verbally what is presented visually by the figures. Few things alienate an
   audience more quickly than crowded viewgraphs with lots of writing in a short talk.

3. Conclusions ≈ 1 minute. Briefly recap the main highlights of your project. If you are showing
   overheads, write out in very short sentences your main findings, and then leave this slide (trans-
   parency) up during the question period so that the main points you wanted to get across will further
   “sink in” with the audience.

If your final project involves more of a “performance” than a research report, select a representative 5
minutes worth of material to show the class.

If you choose to show overheads during your presentations, a key thing to remember is to not show too
many. It is generally thought that about 1 overhead every 2 minutes is a good rate to use during a talk,
so you should probably shoot for no more than 3 overheads.

If you want to show overheads, you may use either overhead transparencies, or Powerpoint. If you wish
to use overheads, I will give you 3 blank transparencies (please return any unused ones!) to use in class
next week; more can be obtained from me if needed. If using Powerpoint, please (a) email me your “.ppt”
file by noon the day of your talk, and (2) if possible, bring it on a CDrom compatible with Microsoft
Windows, and arrive to class half an hour early, to make certain everything will work!

If you opt for transparencies and do not have transparency markers at your disposal, there are some
outside of office (Rm. 201 Cole) that you may use (on the premises and please return when done). To
transfer a picture or figure onto a transparency usually involves: (1) Making a paper photocopy of the
figure; (2) Cutting out the photocopied figure and taping it onto a blank piece of paper; (3) Photocopying
the paper with the figure on it (alone) onto a blank transparency. If you have any difficulty doing this,
you can get help from Arlene King, the Natural Sciences administrative assistant, whose office is on the
3rd floor of Cole (the same building and floor that we have class), at any time.

A final, very important point is to remember that you only have 5 minutes for the presentation! This
means that you must make each word count. Rehearse your presentation several times out loud,
until you have effectively memorized it and gotten its length down to five minutes (it’s OK to bring a piece of paper up with you, but directly reading off of it should be avoided). In a five minute presentation, you can not “wing it” nearly as easily as you can in a longer talk, since you must say things as concisely as possible in order to get through all of the information that you want to present.

The order and titles of the presentations will be given in next week’s handout (Monday, May 3). I look forward to a great week of presentations!