PRESENTER'S GUIDE

Mastering Your First Live Conference Presentation

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A practical guide to preparing and delivering a conference paper in biblical and religious studies, with timing tables, a worked example, worksheets and response scripts.

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SECTION 1

Six Areas to Prepare

01

Know the Room

Know your audience. Even a specialized academic audience may not know your research niche. Define complex terms and concepts.

Set clear goals. Decide what the audience should take away, and tailor content to who is present: scholars, editors or general attendees.

02

Rewrite for the Ear

Build a clear narrative. A strong introduction, an organized body, a clear conclusion.

Adapt the paper. Written papers need substantial editing for oral delivery. Trim detail; prioritize clarity and brevity.

Manage time. Plan to finish early to leave room for Q&A. See the timing table on page 3.

03

Visuals That Carry the Argument

One idea, one figure, one takeaway per slide. See page 7 for ancient-language texts and citations.

04

Deliver with Presence

Posture. Stand tall with an engaged core.

Breathing. Inhale through the nose, exhale through the mouth before you begin.

Rehearsal. Record or time yourself reading aloud. Aim for a relaxed, steady pace.

05

Lead the Q&A

Prepare. Anticipate likely questions.

Clarify. If a question is unclear, ask for clarification before responding.

Reinforce. Use answers to restate key points and add insight.

06

Plan for Technical Problems

Backups. Keep handouts or a saved copy on a flash drive.

Testing. Arrive early. If equipment fails for more than 3 minutes, proceed without it.

Handouts. Physical or digital handouts extend the talk beyond the room.

SECTION 2

Timing and Reading Aloud

Most first-time presenters write too much. At a natural speaking pace of about 130 to 140 words per minute, plan your length from your time slot, not from your paper.

TIME SLOT	SPOKEN WORDS	DOUBLE-SPACED PAGES (12 PT)
10 minutes	1,300 to 1,400	About 5
15 minutes	1,950 to 2,100	About 7 to 8
20 minutes	2,600 to 2,800	About 10
25 minutes	3,250 to 3,500	About 12 to 13
30 minutes	3,900 to 4,200	About 15

Write to the low end of each range. Nerves, slides and transitions add time. Confirm with your session chair whether your slot includes Q&A.

READING A PAPER ALOUD

- Print your reading copy in 14 to 16 pt type, 1.5 or double spaced, with wide margins.
- Number the pages. Do not staple them; slide each finished page aside quietly.
- End each page at the end of a sentence so you never turn mid-thought.
- Mark pauses with a slash (/) and underline words to stress.
- Bracket one or two paragraphs you can skip if you are running long.
- Write signposts into the text: “My second point is…”
- Replace long quotations with a short paraphrase; put the full text on a slide or handout.
- Add pronunciation notes for names and Hebrew or Greek terms.
- Look up at the end of each sentence, not mid-sentence.
- Know your first and last paragraphs nearly by heart.

SECTION 3

Conference-Ready Checklist

TWO WEEKS OUT

- ☐ Rewrite for the ear, not the page. State your claim in one sentence.
- ☐ Cut to the word count for your time slot (page 3).
- ☐ Choose one figure or slide to carry the main idea. One point per slide.
- ☐ Cut material that does not directly support your claim or contribution.
- ☐ Schedule two timed read-aloud rehearsals. List one or two questions you expect.

24 TO 48 HOURS OUT

- ☐ Finalize slides (about one per minute). Export a PDF backup with fonts embedded.
- ☐ Rehearse once naturally and once at target pace (about 130 to 140 words per minute).
- ☐ Confirm logistics: room or video link, session chair, start time and time zone.

DAY OF: IN PERSON

- ☐ Arrive 15 minutes early and introduce yourself to the chair.
- ☐ Load your slides; test the clicker and display.
- ☐ Ask how the chair will signal time.
- ☐ Bring your printed reading copy, adapter and water.

DAY OF: VIRTUAL

- ☐ Log in 10 to 15 minutes early.
- ☐ Test audio, camera framing and lighting.
- ☐ Close other apps and silence notifications.
- ☐ Run a test screen share; keep notes near the camera.

BOTH

- ☐ Breathing cue: 4 counts in, 4 hold, 6 out. Decide which question you will take first.

DURING AND AFTER

- ☐ Open in under 60 seconds: context → question → claim → roadmap.
- ☐ Keep a conversational pace. Pause on transitions. Refer verbally to visuals.
- ☐ Note questions as you listen. Thank the chair or host.
- ☐ Note one improvement for slides and one for delivery. Share a resource link or QR code.

SECTION 4

Paper to Talk: Worked Example

ILLUSTRATIVE SAMPLE

A completed framework for a 20-minute paper on Psalm 82. Borrow the structure, not the content.

01 CLAIM (ONE SENTENCE)

Psalm 82 presents divine judgment as a call to protect the vulnerable, making justice the test of legitimate power.

02 SUPPORTING POINTS

1. The divine council scene frames the gods as rulers accountable for justice.
2. The charge in verses 3 and 4 names the weak, the fatherless, the afflicted and the needy.
3. The sentence in verses 6 and 7 shows that power which fails at justice forfeits its standing.

03 CONTRIBUTION OR IMPLICATION

Read this way, the psalm offers an ancient standard for judging institutions by their care for the vulnerable, relevant to biblical ethics and leadership today.

04 MEMORABLE SENTENCE

"In Psalm 82, even the gods are judged by how they treat the orphan."

05 ROADMAP (THREE STEPS)

1	2	3
The scene: a council on trial	*The charge: justice for the vulnerable*	*The verdict: power that forfeits its claim*

SECTION 5

Paper to Talk Worksheet

Complete this for your own paper before you start cutting.

01 CLAIM (ONE SENTENCE)

02 SUPPORTING POINTS

03 CONTRIBUTION OR IMPLICATION

04 MEMORABLE SENTENCE

05 ROADMAP (THREE STEPS)

1 2 3

06 TIME SLOT AND TARGET WORD COUNT

SECTION 6

Slides for Ancient-Language Work

Texts, translations and citations need extra care on screen.

01

Hebrew and Greek Text

Use Unicode fonts such as SBL Hebrew and SBL Greek, free from the Society of Biblical Literature. Export to PDF or embed fonts so the text displays on any computer, and check right-to-left line breaks and pointing after export.

02

Original and Translation

Show the original beside your translation. Add transliteration for mixed audiences, and highlight only the word or phrase you are discussing.

03

Citations

Keep citations short on screen (author, year, page). Put the full bibliography in a handout. Use one consistent abbreviation style for biblical books, such as the SBL Handbook of Style.

04

Long Passages

Do not put a full passage on a slide. Show the phrase you analyze, and give the full text in a handout or link.

05

Images of Artifacts

Credit the source and holding institution for manuscripts, inscriptions and objects. Crop to the detail you discuss.

06

Density

Aim for one idea and no more than about 25 words per slide. If a slide needs reading time, it belongs in the handout.

SECTION 7

Q&A Scripts

Adapt these to your own voice and research.

Clarify → Answer → Bridge

"If I understand correctly, you are asking about _____. My research shows _____. The broader takeaway for this project is _____."

Stack the Queue Multiple questions

"Let's take two more, and then I'll answer in order. I'm hearing themes of _____ and _____. I'll begin with the first."

Scope Guard Staying on topic

"That is adjacent to today's focus. Briefly: _____. I'm glad to continue after the session or by email."

When You Don't Know Honest and composed

"That's a question I haven't examined closely. My instinct is _____, but I'd want to check _____ first. May I follow up with you by email?"

A Comment, Not a Question Keeping time

"Thank you, that's a helpful connection to _____. In the interest of time, let me take the next question."

If interrupted: finish your sentence, acknowledge the question, then respond: "I'll finish this thought, then come to you."

SECTION 8

Tech Triage

The three-minute rule: if equipment is not working within three minutes, proceed without it.

IF SOMETHING FAILS

01 Pause, name the issue briefly, and try once to resolve it (for example, stop and restart screen sharing).

02 Switch to your PDF backup. Describe the figure verbally if needed.

03 If the problem persists, continue without visuals. Keep your claim and supporting points central.

BACKUPS TO PREPARE

- ☐ PDF of your slides with fonts embedded, saved locally and in the cloud or emailed to yourself.
- ☐ A printed reading copy or speaking notes.
- ☐ A hotspot or alternate network, and a phone number for A/V support.
- ☐ Contact information for your session chair or host.

YOUR RESOURCE LINK

Provide attendees one link or QR code for your slides, handout or recording.

LINK

QR code

SECTION 9

Presence, Interruptions and Authority

01

The First Ten Seconds

Feet grounded, shoulders down. One breath: 4 counts in, 4 hold, 6 out.

"Good [morning]. I'm [Name]. Today I'll show [claim] and why it matters for [field]. We'll move through [roadmap]."

02

Equitable Q&A

Stack the queue: "Let's take two more, then I'll answer in order." Summarize themes before answering.

Invite new voices: "I'd like to hear from someone who hasn't spoken yet."

03

If Interrupted

Finish your sentence, then: "I'll finish this thought, then come to you."

If it continues: "I'll take questions after this section so everyone can follow the argument."

04

If Your Authority Is Challenged

Anchor in method and evidence: "For this study I used ____. Within that scope, the data show ____."

Bridge to scope: "That is a valuable adjacent question; it would require ____. For this project, the result is ____."

05

Voice and Body Language

Combine warmth and firmness: lower your pitch slightly, slow the first clause, and end sentences cleanly without rising intonation.

Use named transitions, such as "Next, the finding that most surprised us." They signal control and reduce interruptions.

SECTION 10

Notes

DATE _____

PAPER REVIEW

Get Feedback Before You Present

Send Dr. Mongé-Greer your abstract and draft. In a one-on-one session, she will review your paper's structure, timing and delivery, and how to turn it into a talk your audience can follow.

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