Paper Presentation Guidelines

ITCS 6101/8101 Natural Language Processing
20-Minute Presentation + 5-Minute Q&A

1. Overview & Purpose

Each student will present a published research paper to the class in a 20-minute talk followed by a 5-minute question-and-answer session. The goal is twofold:

(1) Demonstrate your own understanding of the paper;

(2) Teach the core ideas to your classmates who may not have read it. Your presentation should stand on its own — assume the audience has not read the paper.

A successful presentation is not a summary. It is a curated, pedagogical explanation that gives the audience genuine insight into the problem, the proposed solution, and the significance of the results — along with your own critical perspective on the work's strengths and limitations.

2. Recommended Slide Structure

Aim for approximately 18–22 slides. A useful rule of thumb is roughly one slide per minute. The structure below is a recommendation; adapt it to the specific paper as needed.

2.1 Title Slide (1 slide)

- Full paper title, authors, publication venue, and year
- Your name and presentation date

2.2 Motivation & Problem Statement (2–3 slides)

- What real-world or research problem does this paper address?
- Why is this problem important or challenging?
- What gap in prior work does this paper fill?

2.3 Background & Related Work (2–3 slides)

- Introduce prerequisite concepts your classmates need to understand the paper
- Briefly situate the work relative to key prior approaches
- Be pedagogical — do not assume familiarity with all prerequisite material

2.4 Proposed Method / Core Contribution (4–6 slides)

- Describe the paper's central technical contribution clearly
- Use architecture diagrams, algorithm pseudocode, or data-flow illustrations
- Walk through key equations — **never** just display them; explain every symbol and the formula's intuition
- Include a concrete worked example or toy illustration of the method on a specific input

2.5 Experiments & Results (3–4 slides)

- Describe the datasets used and why they were chosen
- Explain the evaluation metrics
- Present the main quantitative results, highlighting the most significant comparisons
- Summarize any ablation studies or qualitative analyses that illuminate the model's behavior

2.6 Critical Discussion (2–3 slides)

- What are the paper's main strengths?
- What are its limitations, assumptions, or potential failure modes?
- Are the experimental claims fully supported? Are there missing baselines or confounds?
- How does this work compare to contemporaneous or more recent developments in the field?

2.7 Conclusion & Takeaways (1–2 slides)

- Summarize the key contributions in 2–4 concise points
- Highlight open problems or promising future directions

2.8 References (1 slide)

- List the primary paper and any background papers cited during the presentation

2.9 Preemptive Slides

- Think of questions that may be asked, and have slides prepared to answer those questions.
- Topics that could not fit in the main presentation may be covered in these slides, especially if you think people may ask questions about them.

3. Content Requirements

3.1 Instructiveness to Peers

- Define all acronyms and technical terms on first use
- Provide intuition before formalism; explain what a formula means before deriving it
- Walk through key equations step by step — define every symbol
- Use at least one concrete example, toy case, or worked illustration to ground abstract ideas
- Do not assume the audience has read the paper or its prerequisites

3.2 Technical Depth

- Go beyond restating the abstract — demonstrate genuine comprehension of the technical contributions
- Be prepared to explain any slide in depth during Q&A
- Situate the paper within the broader NLP/ML research landscape

3.3 Critical Engagement

- Evaluate the paper's strengths and weaknesses from an informed perspective
- Comment on whether the experimental design convincingly supports the paper's claims
- Identify open questions or limitations that future work could address

3.4 Academic Integrity

- Cite the primary paper and any other works referenced on your slides
- Do not present figures or ideas from the paper as your own — credit the source (e.g., "Figure adapted from [Author et al., Year]")

4. Style & Visual Presentation

4.1 Typography

- Use a single, clean sans-serif font throughout (e.g., Arial, Calibri, or Helvetica) — do not mix fonts
- Recommended sizes: **title 36–40 pt**; **section headings 28–32 pt**; **body text 20–24 pt**; **captions and footnotes 16–18 pt**
- Minimum body text size: **18 pt** — all text must be readable from the back of the room
- Use bold sparingly and only to highlight critical terms or key numbers
- Reserve italics for mathematical variables or brief emphasis; do not use italics for large text blocks

- Maintain consistent font sizes across all slides; do not resize text arbitrarily to make content fit on a slide

4.2 Color & Contrast

- Use a consistent color palette (2–3 accent colors maximum) throughout the entire presentation
- Ensure high contrast between text and background — dark text on a light background, or light text on a dark background
- Do not rely on color alone to convey information; consider viewers with color vision deficiencies
- Avoid garish, distracting, or clashing color combinations
- If using a slide template, apply it uniformly to every slide

4.3 Figures & Diagrams

- All figures must be high resolution — use **vector graphics (SVG, PDF, EMF)** when possible; raster images must be at least 150 DPI at their displayed size
- When resizing figures, **preserve the original aspect ratio**.
- Do **not** use pixelated or blurry screen captures. If the original figure in the paper is low quality, redraw it in a diagramming tool, recreate it from scratch, or find a higher-resolution source
- Every figure must have a clear caption or title label that explains what it shows
- Figures must be large enough to be clearly visible; never place multiple tiny figures side by side on one slide
- Use diagrams actively to illustrate architectures, data pipelines, and algorithms — do not substitute a diagram with a paragraph of text
- When reproducing figures from the paper, include a source attribution (e.g., "Figure adapted from [Author et al., Year]")

4.4 Tables

- Use tables only when comparison data genuinely benefits from tabular layout
- Highlight the most important result (e.g., the proposed method's row) using shading or bold
- Simplify tables from the paper if they have many rows — focus only on the comparisons relevant to your narrative
- All text within tables must meet the minimum font size requirements

4.5 Mathematical Equations

- Use proper mathematical typesetting — LaTeX-rendered equations or your software's equation editor; **do not type equations as plain text**
- Never display an equation without defining every symbol and explaining the formula's purpose

- Break down multi-part or complex equations into smaller components before showing the full expression

4.6 Slide Layout & General Design

- One main idea per slide — do not overcrowd slides with too much text or too many figures
- Use consistent margins, alignment, and spacing throughout the deck
- Leave adequate white space; do not feel compelled to fill every pixel of the slide
- Include **slide numbers on every slide** (the title slide may be excluded)
- Limit animations to subtle effects (e.g., appear, fade) that support the content; avoid distracting transitions
- Avoid decorative clip art, irrelevant stock photos, or visual elements that add no informational value

4.7 Common Mistakes to Avoid

- Pasting long paragraphs or raw sentences from the paper directly onto slides
- Using mismatched or random font sizes across different slides
- Displaying figures without captions, labels, or explanation
- Using a dark, low-contrast, or patterned background that reduces text readability
- Presenting a results table without guiding the audience through the key take-aways
- Including blurry, low-resolution, or pixelated screen captures
- Displaying equations as unformatted plain text

5. Delivery Guidelines

5.1 Preparation

- **Rehearse the full presentation** at least twice, including timing yourself
- Know your slides well enough that you can **present without reading from them**
- **Anticipate likely Q&A questions** and prepare brief answers
- Test your slides on the actual classroom presentation computer / projector in advance

5.2 During the Presentation

- Speak clearly, at a measured pace, and at a volume sufficient for the entire room
- Maintain eye contact with the audience — **do not read from the screen or from notes**
- Use a pointer (laser pointer or cursor) to direct attention to specific elements in figures or tables
- Use explicit transitions between sections to help the audience follow your narrative (e.g., "Now that we've seen the model, let's look at the experiments")
- Prioritize clarity over coverage — if time is short, explain fewer points well rather than many points poorly

5.3 Time Management

- Your presentation **must conclude within 20 minutes** — practice is the only reliable way to achieve this
- Plan in advance which slides to skip or abbreviate if you are running behind
- Do not exceed the time limit; stopping at 20 minutes is a professional responsibility to the audience and to the students who follow you

5.4 Q&A Session

- Listen to each question fully before responding
- It is acceptable — and professionally appropriate — to say "I don't know" or "That's an interesting point; I'm not certain"
- Treat Q&A as a discussion, not an examination: engage with the question, share your reasoning, and invite further conversation

6. Grading Rubric

Presentations will be evaluated on the six criteria below, for a total of 100 points. Within each level, the percentages indicate what fraction of that category's maximum points will be awarded.

Category (Weight)	Excellent (90–100%)	Good (75–89%)	Adequate (60–74%)	Poor (< 60%)
Content & Technical Accuracy **30 pts**	All key concepts explained accurately and completely. Paper's contributions fully and correctly described. Presenter demonstrates deep understanding of the method and its significance.	Most content accurate; minor technical errors or omissions. Main contributions covered with only small gaps.	Some inaccuracies or significant coverage gaps. Some concepts misunderstood or poorly explained. Key results or claims missing.	Major technical errors. Substantial misunderstanding of the paper's content. Core contributions missing or incorrectly described.
Pedagogical Quality (Instructiveness) **20 pts**	All background and technical terms clearly explained. Equations walked through step by step with intuition. Audience could follow without having read the paper. Concrete examples provided.	Most concepts explained clearly. Minor gaps in background. Content is largely accessible to classmates.	Some background missing; difficult for non-readers to follow. Few examples or illustrations of ideas.	Assumes audience already knows the material. Little to no explanation of concepts. No concrete examples. Essentially reads the abstract.
Critical Analysis & Depth **10 pts**	Thoughtful evaluation of strengths and weaknesses. Original insights beyond paper summary. Work situated in the broader NLP/ML landscape. Future directions identified.	Some critique offered. Work briefly situated relative to prior work. Limitations mentioned but not deeply analyzed.	Mostly summary with superficial analysis. Limitations section perfunctory. No original perspective.	Pure summary. No critical engagement. No analysis of limitations. No situating of work in the field.
Slide Design & Visual Quality **15 pts**	Professional, consistent design. All text ≥ 20 pt. All figures high-resolution and clearly labeled. No pixelated images. Good use of white space. Equations properly typeset.	Generally clean design. Minor font or color inconsistencies. Most figures clear. Minor visual issues that do not significantly impair readability.	Noticeable design inconsistencies. Some text too small. Pixelated or unlabeled figures. Slides feel cluttered. Equations typed as plain text.	Major visual problems. Text unreadable from the room. Pixelated images. No design consistency. Slides appear unpolished or hastily assembled.
Delivery & Communication **15 pts**	Clear, confident speech. Addresses the audience (not the screen). Good pacing with smooth transitions. Stays within 20-minute	Generally clear speech. Mostly addresses audience. Minor pacing issues. Slightly over or under time limit.	Some mumbling or rushing. Reads from slides. Noticeable pacing problems. Significantly over or under time.	Difficult to follow. Primarily reads from slides. Major timing problems. Audience disengaged.

Category (Weight)	Excellent (90–100%)	Good (75–89%)	Adequate (60–74%)	Poor (< 60%)
	limit. Engaging and well-rehearsed.			
Q&A Handling **10 pts**	Handles all questions accurately and thoughtfully. Engages in genuine discussion. Acknowledges uncertainty gracefully when appropriate.	Handles most questions well. Occasional difficulty with challenging questions.	Struggles with multiple questions. Limited engagement. Some deflection.	Unable to address most questions. Appears unprepared. Dismissive or evasive.

Total: 100 points ｜ **A: 90–100** ｜ **B: 75–89** ｜ **C: 60–74** ｜ **D: 45–59** ｜ **F: < 45**

Note: The rubric is intended to guide your preparation and to make grading transparent, not to be applied mechanically. Exceptional work that does not fit neatly into a single column will be graded holistically with the spirit of each criterion in mind.