

Tips for preparing presentations for a reading group:

1. Give yourself time! It's difficult to give any other piece of general advice because every paper is different, and the most interesting aspect of a presentation will be a student's idiosyncratic take on that paper. Reading a paper actively can be a very time-consuming process. Give yourself a lot of time (e.g., start at least two weeks before your presentation if possible). You may have to go over the paper several times, and read a few additional papers to truly understand the contribution of the paper you will be presenting on. All of this takes a lot of time.
2. Concentrate your presentation on the essence of the paper. What is the core of the contribution of this paper? Anything else (extensions, robustness checks, literature review other than the most relevant prior work) can be left out or mentioned in passing.
3. Know the technical details, but be ok giving us an executive summary of these details in your presentation rather than having thousands of symbols or lengthy discussions of datasets in your slides.
4. Have a clear structure in mind. For instance: What is the research question of the paper? Why is it important/interesting/novel? What is the main result in the paper? Why is it impressive/interesting/novel? The particularities of the paper would then dictate subcontent within these questions.
5. For an econometrics/theory paper, the best way to digest the (important) technical details of the paper is to fully digest the proof of the main result (or main couple results if needed). It can be very helpful to rewrite the proof line-by-line in your own words. Picture yourself teaching the proof in class and writing lecture notes for it.
6. For empirical papers, you generally want to understand the empirical framework that was chosen. What role does each part of the model play in the analysis? For instance, how is the model able to both produce results that are empirically credible and to provide an answer to the research question of the paper. Why is the model identified? What are limitations of the model? Are these acknowledged in the paper?
7. Most students are presenting in pairs. If that's the case, I recommend alternating between working on your own and interacting with the other presenter. You need time on your own to make your own interpretation of a paper, but bouncing ideas off the other presenter may be helpful to make progress.