



CAMWS Guide for Presenters

Purpose and Scope

In recent years the meetings of the Classical Association of the Middle West and South (CAMWS) have become a popular forum for classicists to make their first major professional presentation, whether as junior faculty members at a college or university, as secondary or elementary school teachers, as graduate students, or even as undergraduates. The present Guide was commissioned by the CAMWS Executive Committee to provide practical assistance, not only to first-time presenters, but also to experienced speakers who have never attended a CAMWS meeting. The Guide does not address questions of content but concentrates on protocol (etiquette) and mechanics.

It is the policy of the organization that all presenters must be current members of CAMWS and must register for the meeting at which they give a paper. It is also CAMWS policy that submission of an abstract represents a commitment to present in person or to find someone else to present it, should compelling circumstances prevent attendance at the meeting. Skyping and other forms of proxy technology are not considered appropriate alternatives to presenting in person.

1. Composition

Before submitting an abstract you should consider seriously whether or not the topic will make a suitable and effective oral presentation. Some topics just do not lend themselves to a fifteen- or twenty-minute spoken presentation. Your ideas and evidence may be solid, but if you cannot make them understood in this format, you will not make a good impression or convince your audience.

Make sure that you provide all the information required when you submit your abstract, especially if you are requesting audio-visual equipment, since it must be rented at considerable expense. Do not request equipment unless you will definitely use it, and do not expect equipment that you did not request to be provided for you at the last moment. If your equipment needs should change suddenly in the weeks before the meeting, notify the organizers immediately.

Although scholarly writing varies greatly from one area to another, a few considerations apply in general. First and foremost, bear in mind that there is a great difference between an effective oral presentation and a good article written for print. Keep your talk free of undefined terminology unless you are very sure of the expertise of your audience. Avoid quoting a large amount of Greek and Latin, for it is extremely difficult to follow. Either put such passages on a handout or precede them with a clear translation. PowerPoint presentations can be effective, but you must be prepared for the technology to fail or the electricity to go off. Always have a Plan B, e.g., a fully written script that you can read without electronic accompaniment.

2. Preparation

A handout is often a good idea, especially if you wish to draw attention to textual material, bibliography, or visual details. Since the handout is a scholarly contribution for which you are accountable and deserve credit, you should include on it your name, address, and the title and session of your talk. Keep the handout short, relevant to the topic being covered, and easily understood. Number the passages and refer to them as you speak. Include only essential bibliography. Make sure that the handout is legible and leave white space for notes. Bring a sufficient number of copies (generally c. 50).

Practice your completed oral presentation at least once in front of a live audience. Listeners at the level of expertise you expect to encounter will provide the best barometer of the effectiveness of your argumentation. Spouses, pets, and cinder-block walls can help you judge the speed and length of delivery. Above all, make certain that your paper will be (not just can be) delivered within the time allotted. About eight double-spaced pages can be read in fifteen minutes at an understandable pace. If possible, aim for making the paper short by a couple of minutes. No one has ever been criticized for taking less than the allotted time, but presidors are requested to hurry or even cut off speakers who exceed their limit. It is both unfair and rude to the other speakers in the session when one person takes more than his or her share of time.

A presidor should contact you in advance with information about the session and a request for biographical information to use for introducing you. Respond promptly with the information requested. Submitting a proposal is a professional commitment to register for and to attend the meeting and to deliver the paper as accepted and in person. If for any reason you cannot, you must immediately notify the presidor and provide an explanation to the organizers. At a minimum arrange to have someone else deliver the paper; anything less is unprofessional.

The abstracts for your session will be posted on the CAMWS website. Read these and prepare potential questions for the discussion that will take place during the session.

It is also possible for you to post your handout, Powerpoint and other materials related to your presentation on the CAMWS website. This will insure that all attendees, as well as others unable to attend, have access to this material.

3. A/V Needs

More and more professional papers require the use of audio-visual resources. Be sure that you have properly informed the CAMWS office of your needs and confirm your needs with your presidor prior to the meeting. Be sure to come prepared with a back-up plan in case this technology does not work. Please remember that you should be prepared to use your own laptop for your presentation.

4. Delivery

Well in advance of your talk, check the room in which it will be delivered to make certain that it has everything you need. If you are using a digital projector, verify that the connection with your laptop computer works. Meet with the presidor and the other presenters at least ten minutes before the session. Arrange for someone who will

distribute your handouts as you are being introduced by the presider; normally presenters are happy to do this for each other. Sit with the other presenters near the front.

Once you begin speaking, remember that this is an oral presentation; make every effort to hold your audience by maintaining eye contact, modulating your voice, and employing a lively delivery. Do not attempt to compensate for a long text by reading fast. Also, clearly indicate when you are finishing.

It is crucial that you keep within your time limit. After your talk, if time permits, the presider will invite questions or comments from the audience. The presider is in charge of calling on individuals and managing the discussion. You should answer briefly and to the point; if a lengthy response is necessary, offer to meet with the questioner after the session ends. Remain at the podium until the presider brings the discussion to a close.

Stay for the entire session. It is extremely rude for a presenter to leave before hearing the other presenters. If there is some compelling reason for you to leave early, inform the presider ahead of time.