Some Do’s and Don’ts on Presenting Papers at Finance Conferences and Beyond

G. Andrew Karolyi, Cornell University
The Golden Rule

Maximize the opportunity to have your research heard and known

- Accept the invitation, show up and strive always to deliver
- Your peers – usually too busy to read the papers – use these opportunities to watch & evaluate you & your work
- One opportunity often leads to the next (Remember: “Every talk is a ‘job talk’”)
- Think about your reputational capital
How to organize a talk

Rule #1
Understand your constraints

• Think about how many slides are feasible for a 90-minute seminar talk versus an 18-minute conference talk versus an 8-minute discussion
• Respect the “Rule of 2”
• Practice your talk; reduce slides, then practice some more
• Never say “I do not have time to present…” & then renege
• Do not challenge the authority of the session chair or the seminar host; they are “your friends”!
Opening any presentation

Rule #2
Focus on your work and its contributions

- Opening slide is about YOUR paper! What you do, how you do it, & what you find (this is NOT a mystery novel)
- DO NOT start with a long literature review
- Next slide outlines the key contributions (what is new and why is this finding important)
- Motivate as broadly as you can why you and your co-authors engaged in this research project
Present the work to the audience

Rule #3
Focus on communicating the main message

- Emphasize only what the audience will remember later
- Present the “showcase” table of results (no robustness tests), or model framework & key propositions (not proofs)
- Make sure graph labels, tables are legible, show few equations, & define variables in equation (no one read paper first!)
- Focus on economics, not how many asterisks (“t-test-itis”)
- Do NOT read your slides to the audience
Before & during the conference

Rule #4
Attend even if you cannot present or discuss

• Ascendant scholars should strive to attend 1 – 2 major conferences (AFA, WFA, EFA, SFS Cavalcade, FMA) and 1 - 2 specialty ones in your field each year
• Submit your papers, be aware of deadlines
• Can you get sufficient funding? Self-finance to finesse school-imposed constraints?
• Ask questions at sessions, panels, tutorials; people watch
• Attend as many luncheons, receptions as possible
Discussing a paper

Rule #5
Critically and constructively review

• You are not the referee to advise the editor on publishability; consider what you, as author, would seek from the exchange
• Emphasize strengths & weaknesses to the audience; help to position the paper for the audience; focus on how weaknesses could be remedied
• Make 2 or 3 main critical comments at most; no editorial ones
• DO NOT WASTE TIME SUMMARIZING THE PAPER! (Worse, do not tell us you ran out of time to offer a review, if you did!!!)
• Never pronounce your lack of expertise on the paper and never crassly utilize your time to showcase your own work