Presenting a Paper at the Young Historians Conference
Portland State University Challenge Program

Congratulations on the selection of your research paper for presentation at the Young Historians Conference! Here are a few hints for making the experience as fruitful and fulfilling as possible:

**Length:**

Conference sessions last 75 minutes and typically feature three papers followed by commentary from a Portland State History professor and the opportunity for audience participation. This means your presentation should run between 15 and 20 minutes.

The normal rule for reading time is ~minutes a page (1” margins, 12-pt. font, double-spaced), meaning you should figure on not much more than 8 pages for the length of your paper. The best way to handle this is to produce an abbreviated version of your research paper for oral delivery.

**Reading Papers:**

Presenting your paper is the culmination of all the hard work you put in during the research and writing process. Keep in mind that at this point, you probably know more about your topic than anyone in the room, including, in many cases, the academic commentator! You want to use your “15 minutes of fame” to make your subject as compelling and engaging to the audience as it is to you.

Think of your presentation as a sales pitch in which you seek to entice listeners into the world your research has uncovered and open their minds to your interpretations and conclusions.

**Pace, Tone, and Emphasis:**

Several easy tricks can help translate your research into an effective presentation that will engage the audience and convince them they have learned something from your efforts.

Do not rush through the reading. Hurrying through the text as if you cannot wait to be finished is the best way to lose an audience’s interest. If you have edited your text down to 8 pages, you will have plenty of time to present it at a pace that enables listeners to absorb what you have to say.

Vary the speed at which you read. When you come to a particularly important phrase or sentence, slow down for dramatic emphasis so that listeners pay attention.

Avoid reading in a monotone. This means not simply varying the pace at which you read, but on occasion, altering the volume of your voice for dramatic effect.

The easiest way to avoid a mechanical reading of the text is to use a pen to underline a particular word in each sentence that needs particular emphasis. It also helps to look at the audience when you linger on a particular phrase or point. In fact, the more you practice lifting your eyes from the page as you read, the more effective your presentation.

Remember, this is your show! Your enthusiasm and interest in your subject can be infectious. When you are enjoying the presentation and respecting the audience by delivering the text in an effective manner, they will be grateful, you will feel personally validated, and everyone will come away from the experience feeling the time was well worth it.