

SSSG Organizational Guidelines

SSSG is a required class with the goal of improving speaking skills through presenting to a diverse audience of software engineering faculty and students. It is also a great opportunity to learn what your fellow students are doing. To make SSSG interesting for all participants, we should follow a few rules.

There are two formats for SSSG starting Fall'21, which this document refers to as Format A and Format B. In the Fall semester, the first few weeks will run with Format A, whereas the rest of the Fall semester and the entire Spring semester will run with Format B. The two formats are intended to allow for different styles of talks and also to ensure that every registered student is able to give at least two SSSG talks each academic year.

Timing

A typical 80 minutes SSSG class allows for six presentations in Format A or two presentations in Format B, coordinated by a session chair.

In **Format A**, each presentation is limited to 10 minutes, with an additional 2-3 minutes for changeover of speakers. Quick clarification questions may be addressed during the changeover.

In **Format B**, each SSSG presenter should limit their talk to no more than 25 minutes, preferably 20 minutes (exceptions may be granted on a well-argued request, e.g., job practice talk or a conference keynote). An additional 15 minutes is available to allow for answering audience questions and feedback.

The time limits are strictly enforced by the session chair. Please practice your presentation beforehand to ensure you will not run over

The time limit on Format B talks leaves plenty of time for questions and feedback, a key function of SSSG. Unless specifically invited by the speaker, attendees should generally hold their questions until after the talk and limit questions during the talk to issues important for understanding the content (e.g., what is meant by a specific term). It is a good practice to write down questions during the talk, ask some of them after the talk, and share the rest with the presenter offline. The session chair is encouraged to stop excessive interruptions and discussions that arise during the talk. If there is no discussion after a talk, SSSG ends early. Alternative formats for interaction can be requested by the speaker.

Please arrive on time. SSSG starts promptly at 3:05pm. If you are presenting, please be there 5 to 10 minutes early to setup and to synchronize with the session chair.

Format, Goals, and Announcement

Format A talks by students are expected to be concise but crisp overviews of one's research or thesis-in-progress. Since this format is implemented at the start of the Fall semester, one of the goals is for presenters—typically continuing graduate students—to introduce their research to new members of the community.

While most Format B SSSG talks tend to focus on the presenter's recent original research, SSSG allows for many different kinds of presentations that convey different messages and serve different goals. Examples include surveys or overviews of a research field, reports on your practical experiences, reports on early research ideas or work in progress, and practice talks for conference talks.

Similarly, Format B SSSG presentations can have different goals. Examples include: (1) getting technical feedback and additional ideas on a new research direction; (2) getting feedback on the effectiveness of a conference presentation or tutorial's logic, layout and form; and (3) encouraging others to try a tool or investigate a research method. If your goal differs from the typical format, be explicit about it.

Presenters should think about what kind of presentation they are giving, the main message of their presentation, and their goal they want to achieve with their presentation upfront. Presenters should align the presentation to convey that message and meet that goal.

All presentations are announced upfront with a title and abstract several days before the session. The session chair will introduce the presentation during the session. The announcement and introduction should identify the kind of presentation and its goals, especially if it differs from the norm.

From time to time, ISR faculty or external speakers may be invited to give talks in SSSG. While most of these talks will follow the same formats as above, exceptions may be made for special presentations such as reprises of keynotes or other notable talks.

Feedback (mainly pertains to Format B)

Feedback during SSSG has the goal of coaching and should avoid evaluation. It should provide encouragement to improve the work and the presentation style. Presenters are encouraged to actively seek feedback by asking the audience to focus on specific points. Presenters should include slide numbers in their presentations to allow detailed feedback.

All audience members (students, faculty, and guests) are encouraged to take notes and hand or email them to the presenter at the end of the session. Presenters are encouraged to discuss the feedback with their peers and advisor.

Feedback may cover many different facets of the talk's content and presentation (try to provide feedback on multiple of them):

- **Technical content:** Was the context and the problem clear? Was there a novel contribution? Was the argument sufficiently supported? Were the conclusions clear and plausible? Are there suggestions additional literature or for future work?
- **Clarity:** Was the purpose of the talk clear? Did the presenter give sufficient context to understand the talk? Were all definitions clear? Were examples used adequately?
- **Visual style:** Were the slides visually appealing? Were visualizations adequate? Were fonts and figures legible?
- **Organization:** Was the structure of the talk clear and well chosen to support a point? Were the transitions between topics clear and effective? Was there an effective opening and closing to the presentation? Was the time well managed?
- **Delivery:** Was the delivery natural, enthusiastic? Did the presenter engage with or activate the audience, at least through eye contact? Was the speech clear, loud enough, and adequately paced? Were appropriate gestures, posture, expressions used? Does the presenter have habits that should be avoided?
- **Discussion:** Were questions evaded or answered satisfactory, clearly, correctly, efficiently?

All feedback should be constructive: suggest improvement instead of pointing out faults. Comment on the presentation, not the presenter (e.g., “the slide design lacked ...” instead of “you didn’t...”). Providers of feedback are not necessarily authoritative sources with respect to the content or public speaking; their feedback provides their own *honest opinions* and does not necessarily represent other audience members (e.g., “hard to understand for me” or “I was impressed with” instead of “the audience did not get it” or “one must”). Presenters may need to distill the relevant feedback, sometimes even from inconsistent or contradictory opinions.

For presenters, it may be a good idea to ask somebody in the audience to act as their scribe. The scribe writes down questions and comments from the audience during and after the talk and passes those notes to the presenter. Having a scribe frees the presenter from having to remember the feedback in an already stressful situation.

Use the opportunity that the presentations are recorded. Although sometimes painful, it can be instructive to watch your own performance. This is also a good way of remembering questions asked during the presentation. The recordings can be found at the [SCS Panopto website](#).

Organizational Issues

Browsing the web, reading papers, or doing research or homework during SSSG can be distracting to others. Please use the time to provide quality feedback to the speaker. Presenters can encourage an atmosphere where such distractions are not needed in the first place by giving great talks.

Session Chair

The primary tasks of the session chair are (1) introducing the speakers and setting the context for their talks and (2) keeping the time.

The session chair should arrive 5 to 10 minutes ahead of time and ask the speakers about the kind of talk they are giving and their goals -- and potentially specific kinds of feedback they are seeking. The session chair should briefly introduce the talk and its goals to the audience and encourage the audience to provide written feedback.

The session chair is responsible for keeping the time. The session chair ensures that SSSG starts and ends on time. It is common to give the presenter a 2–5 minute warning and the session chair has the right to stop the presentation when the time limit is reached (if necessary by disconnecting the laptop's video connector).

The session chair should also have an eye on the audience and limit questions during the talk to essential clarification questions (unless requested otherwise). The session chair will usually moderate the discussion period and may want to pay attention to giving different audience members a chance to speak. The session chair may also lead the discussion to different aspects, such as, encouraging feedback on the presentation style and not just the technical content. If and only if there are no initial questions, it's the session chair's job to jump start the discussion after the talk with a first question; otherwise the session chair should try not to participate in the discussion to preserve a neutral and authoritative role. The chair may also sign in those who forgot to sign-in.

SSSG Feedback Form

(the following questions can guide your feedback, but are not required; feel free to email feedback to the speaker)

Your name: _____ Speaker: _____

Summarize the talk's key message in one sentence:

Name one thing that you think worked especially well in this presentation (form or delivery):

Suggest one *specific* change how the presenter can improve the presentation:

Please provide additional feedback:

You may want to consider the following categories and questions:

- **Technical content:** Was the context and the problem clear? Was there a novel contribution? Was the argument sufficiently supported? Were the conclusions clear and plausible? Are there suggestions additional literature or for future work?
- **Clarity:** Did the presenter give sufficient context to understand the talk? Was the purpose of the talk clear? Were all definitions clear? Were examples used adequately?
- **Visual style:** Were the slides visually appealing? Were visualizations adequate? Were fonts and figures legible?
- **Organization:** Was the structure of the talk clear and well chosen to support a point? Were the transitions between topics clear and effective? Was there an effective opening and closing to the presentation?
- **Delivery:** Was the delivery natural, enthusiastic? Did the presenter engage with or activate the audience? Was the speech clear, loud enough, and adequately paced? Were appropriate gestures, posture, expressions used? Does the presenter have habits that should be avoided?
- **Discussion:** Were questions evaded or answered satisfactory (clearly, correctly, efficiently)?

Remember: Coaching over evaluation; be constructive; discuss the presentation, not the presenter.