

Thank you!

Thanks for volunteering to run the seminar for a while. It's your seminar! You're going to meet some very interesting people you wouldn't otherwise meet, and learn about some very interesting research.

Your main goal:

Your goal is to have a good talk *every week*. That way, a large audience will get into the habit of just showing up every Friday at 3pm. They won't even check to see who the speaker is.

How to generate good talks:

You can recruit speakers from the natural language group, from ISI as a whole, from USC as a whole, or from California as a whole. If there is something extremely exciting going on at Berkeley, we can find a way to pay for a speaker to come down for a day.

Look around locally to see what research is most interesting to you. If you find something fascinating, others probably will too. If you don't know what's going on, then you have the best excuse in the world to go talk to people.

Ask students: "What are you working on?" Ask junior researchers: "Are there things going on around here that you'd like to hear more about?" Ask senior researchers: "What big research trend is the institute missing out on?" Give them time to think about it.

Do your local recruiting in person. Walk around to people's offices and talk to them. Have they published a paper recently? Do they have some half-baked ideas they'd like to talk about?

If you see a good opportunity, be sure to nail down a date right there. Don't leave with a vague agreement to maybe schedule something in the future. Bring your seminar calendar with you.

People will always agree to do something that is a month (or more) away. One time, a group of mathematicians asked me to give a talk at a conference that was *two years away!* I said yes immediately, without even thinking of how much work it would be. The situation you want to avoid: you realize you haven't had a speaker for the past three weeks, and you're trying like mad to book someone for the day after tomorrow.

Summer interns are a great source of external talks. Some of the summer interns are here because they have already done some exceptional research. Each of them should get a chance to present.

When you communicate with people outside ISI, it's good to write to them a bit more formally than you normally would. It's even fine to say, "I'm writing in my capacity as the organizer of the ISI natural language seminar." Basically, you want them to know you are organized and will be

able to answer any question they might have. Don't suggest a topic or title for their talk. You don't want them to go and prepare something less interesting than what they already have.

External speakers will often want to spend a day at ISI to meet researchers and find out what we do, so you should offer to host their visit. If they accept, then you can ask if they have time constraints on arriving to ISI and/or leaving. I can help with creating a visit schedule.

How not to do it:

Sometimes I get a broadcast email from a seminar organizer like this: "If anyone wants to talk at the seminar, or has any ideas for speakers, please shoot me an email. I only know people in my own area, so I appreciate your help." It doesn't work.

Follow up:

When you get back to your office, enter the speaker's name into the public seminar calendar (use their home page if you're unsure of spelling). Then follow up with a confirmation email, giving a link to the calendar and requesting a talk title. The speaker will click the link and see other talks, so then they know it's a real thing. As soon as you get the talk title, put it in the public seminar calendar.

Later, follow up and ask for an abstract. *Whenever you ask for anything specific, always include a due date.* Just make up a date! Like this: "Please send me an abstract by next Wednesday, November 30." If you don't include a date, you probably won't get mail back.

Everyone has their own reasons not to give a talk:

You will often hear: "Sorry, I don't have anything for you right now. However, I just started working on X, which is very interesting ... of course, it's in no shape to be presented."

Researchers tend to forget about work they have already finished, even things they accomplished just a few months ago. They're currently working on X, so their whole world revolves around X!

Your response can be: "What's your favorite piece of research work that you finished in the last 12-18 months?"

Or you might try: "Tell me more about X. Ok. Really? Well, this is fascinating! Can I put you down to give a talk three months from now? It can be a kind of progress summary."

Suppose you hear: "I published a paper, but I already presented it at a conference to people in my field."

Your response can be: "What's it about? Great! Your colleagues here really want to know about this, and you already have the slides. Can I put you down for one month from now?"

Interesting talks:

Of course, the talks should be interesting. If you're talking to a researcher and thinking "I can't understand a word this person is saying" ... then you can always say "No problem, if you change your mind about presenting, please let me know."

But give PhD students a break -- they need experience giving talks. Advisors can help them pitch their talks correctly to the audience. All PhD students should give regular seminars.

At the talk:

Introduce speakers nicely. Give some background, even if the person is local. Not everybody knows everybody, and there are often new people in the audience. Background includes where the person works and what their official title is. You don't need to do more, but you shouldn't do less. Some people like to tell some personal story about the speaker, ranging from funny to plain awkward.

Don't read the title of the talk or describe what you think the talk is about. The speaker is going to do that anyway.

Think of one question during the talk. If there are no questions from the audience after the talk, you can ask one. Thinking of a question also keeps you focused and makes sure you get something out of every presentation.

You are in charge of deciding when to start the talk, and when to end. Take charge!

Be sure to tell the speaker in advance that they can talk for no more than one hour, including questions. *Then enforce it.* It's not good to have audience members filtering out of the room one by one.

For example, you can stand up when an hour has passed, during the question period. This sends an easy-to-read signal. You can also bring a piece of paper with a "5" written on it, and flash it to the speaker ten minutes before the hour. Once in a while, you might let things go a few minutes past the hour, if the speaker is fascinating and has people riveted to their seats.

Thank you again!

These are just basic guidelines. Feel free to give the seminar series your own personal spin! And if you find yourself at a loss, come talk to me. I can always go on a little office tour with you, or help out with some brainstorming.