

How to give a (great) presentation

...

*or at least one that has a good
chance of getting your point across*

Carlos Gabriel / ESA

... largely borrowed from Randall Smith / SAO

There is No “One True Way”



Goals of Any Talk

- To explain your work and your idea(s)
 - Hopefully described in 1-2 sentences
- To engage your audience
 - They'll remember what you said
- To intrigue your audience
 - They'll ask questions and make suggestions
- To impress your audience
 - They might hire you or approve your grant

Overall Ideas

- Use a talk style you are comfortable with
- Watch how others give talks
 - Experiment with new ideas
- **You get better with practice!**
 - Try to give as many talks as you can

Overall Ideas

When laying out your talk:

It is always better to explain
why you did something, than
to explain **what** you did

Outlines

- Always have an outline in mind; you may even want to show it at the outset
- The rule of threes:
 - Tell them what you're going to tell them
 - Tell them
 - Tell them what you just told them.

General Principles

- **SPEAK SLOWLY!**
 - Nerves make people speak quickly
 - Or say “um” or “ah” to fill the space.
- What we think is a long space may not be, particularly if someone is speaking slowly.

General Principles

- **SPEAK LOUDLY!**
 - Talk to the back of the room and project.
 - If we cannot hear you, then your talk is lost.
 - Don't worry about your English ability.
 - Multi-lingual listeners understand it's hard
 - English-only listeners are embarrassed to begin with
 - The late arriver who is standing in the back may be the most important listener. She needs to hear you!

General Principles

- Be conscious of personal ticks - swaying, movements, etc.
- When you speak, you should stand with your feet shoulder width apart and stand on both feet at all times, unless moving for a specific purpose.
- Laser pointers should be used sparingly – they can be very distracting (and even damaging!)
- Anything in your hands is an opportunity for a distracting tick.

Practical Talk Issues

- Do **not** use yellow, light blue, pink, light green.
 - Use red, bold, blue, and if you absolutely need it, green.
- No small fonts (24 pt and up).
- Try not to use the bottom of the slide; it often can't be seen in the back of the room.

You don't want to put footnotes in a talk!

Practical Talk Issues

- Make sure the text is not too dense
 - If it really needs to be that dense, break it up into several progressive slides.
 - If you can't read it from 3 meters easily, it is too small/dense.
- Try that the audience looks at you most of the time
 - You are the central element of your presentation

Practical Talk Issues

- Font with serifs are harder to read than sans-serif fonts.
- Helvetica is almost always a good choice

Practical Talk Issues

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Practical Talk Issues

- A practice talk is **always** a good idea
- Offer to give the talk at your institution before the conference or trip.
- If scientific colleagues are not available, give the talk to your friends, your spouse, your cat.

Practical Talk Issues

- Plan on spending 90-120 seconds per slide.
- Do **not** exceed your allotted time.
 - Even the best talk can be ruined if too long
 - 5% too long is an annoyance.
 - 5% too short is a blessing.

Practical Talk Issues

- Make a PDF version of your talk.
- Movies grab the audience's attention, but they fail about 50% of the time.
 - Check to see if your movie works beforehand
 - Be prepared for movies to fail

Practical Talk Issues



Figures are more powerful than words

Practical Talk Issues

- Avoid reading your slides; they are there as a starting point for you to elaborate on the subject.
- **Have something prepared to say besides the words on the slide!**
- A page of notes is allowed

Practical Talk Issues

Powerpoint /
Keynote
have many
fancy features
to grab your
audiences'
attention.

DO NOT USE THEM



Advanced Topics

- People will remember and appreciate humor, but make sure it is related to your overall point.
- Referencing other talks/posters that are in the meeting is a good idea
- A Google ‘image’ search is a great way to get an appropriate image on short notice.
 - But make sure you note the source somewhere

Conclusions

- If you get across your 1-2 sentence idea, you have succeeded
- Think of speaking as a performance
 - Act boldly!
- Be prepared for questions
 - Questions breed questions.
 - Plant one with a friend if possible!

Last minute advice

- Avoid (too much) wine
(+ champagne + lemoncello),
and try to get enough sleep
the night before your presentation!