

Oral Presentation Advice

Helpful Hints · Common Mistakes



things to think about

how to make an effective oral presentation

Oral Communication is different from written communication

- ✦ Listeners have one chance to hear your talk
- ✦ K.I.S.S. (keep it simple stupid)
- ✦ repeat key insights

Think about your audience

- experts in your sub-area, experts in the general area, others
- set up the body to experts, but make the forecast and summary accessible to all

Think about your rhetorical goals

- ✦ leave the audience with a clear picture of the gist of the study
- ✦ make the audience want to *read the paper (conference)*
- ✦ make the audience *interested in your work (academic interview)*

Think about your rhetorical goals

- ✦ provide a **clear summary** of the paper (*journal club*)
- ✦ make explicit the **relation** between the **data** and the **model** (*CN course presentation*)

Practice in public

- ✦ It is hard distilling work down to 20 or 30 minutes.
- ✦ prepare, prepare and then prepare

A Generic Talk Outline

A Generic Talk Outline

- ✦ Title/author/affiliation (1 slide)
- ✦ Forecast (1 slide)
- ✦ Outline (1 slide)

A Generic Talk Outline

- ✦ Background
 - ✦ Motivation and Problem Statement (1 slide)
 - ✦ Related Work (0-1 slide)
 - ✦ Methods (1-2 slides)

A Generic Talk Outline

- ✦ Results (4-6 slides)
- ✦ Summary (1 slide)
- ✦ Future Work (0-1 slides)
- ✦ Backup Slides (0-3 slides)

How to Give a Bad Talk

Ten Commandments

David A. Patterson (1983)

Ten commandments

(with annotations)

- ✦ You shall not be neat
(Why waste research time preparing slides? Ignore spelling, grammar and legibility. Who cares what 50 people think?)
- ✦ You shall not waste space
(Transparencies are expensive. If you can save five slides in each of four talks per year, you save \$7.00/year!)
- ✦ You shall not desire brevity
(Do you want to continue the stereotype that engineers can't write? Always use complete sentences, never just key words)

Ten commandments

(with annotations)

- ✦ You shall cover your naked slides
(You need the suspense! Overlays are too flashy)
- ✦ You shall not write large
(Be humble - use a small font. Important people sit in front. Who cares about the riff-raff?)
- ✦ You shall not use color
(Flagrant use of color indicates uncareful research. It's also unfair to emphasize some words over others)

Ten commandments

(with annotations)

- ✦ You shall not illustrate
(Confucius says "A picture = 10K words," but Dijkstra says "Pictures are for weak minds." Who are you going to believe?)
- ✦ You shall not make eye contact
(You should avert eyes to show respect. Blocking screen can also add mystery)
- ✦ You shall not skip slides in a long talk
(You prepared the slides; people came for your whole talk; so just talk faster. Skip your summary and conclusions if necessary)

Ten commandments

(with annotations)

- ✦ You shall not practice

(Why waste research time practicing a talk? It could take several hours out of your two years of research. How can you appear spontaneous if you practice? If you do practice, make sure your talk is longer than the time you have to present it.)

Commandment X is most important.

Even if you break the other nine, this one can save you.