

PhD Seminar

Presentation Hints

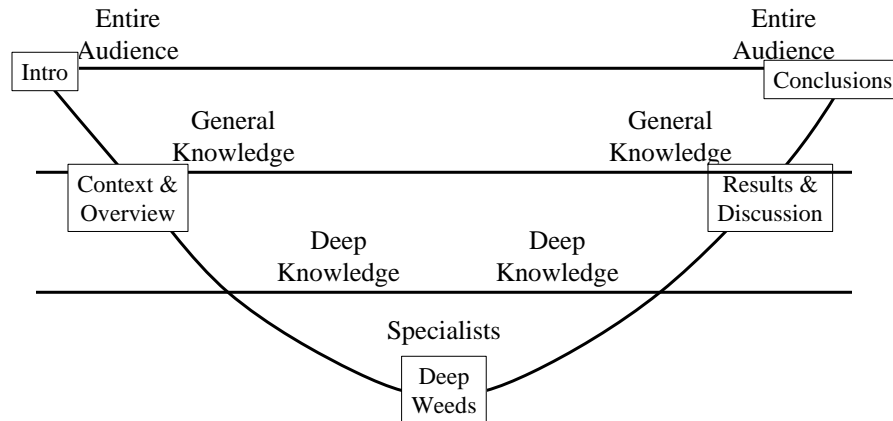
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Always Start a Talk With Something the Audience Already Knows

A good talk will have an introduction that begins by restating something the audience already knows, then presents new material in increasing levels of difficulty, then closes by relating each level to the previous level, and concluding by relating the entire talk to something the audience knew ahead of time.

Generic Outline – 4 Levels



Presentations

All Good Talks Tell a Story

- Introduce characters (rabbit, fox)
- Describe an important problem (fox wants to eat rabbit)
- Relate events that resolve the problem (rabbit tells fox about thesis)
- A few examples (rabbit tells wolf, ...)
- Draw a general conclusion that is supported by your story (thesis doesn't matter, only advisor)

Introduction



- Introduce characters: Motivate your work
 - Convey why the problem you are solving is interesting, important and exciting
 - Place your work in context: how is it different from what others have done
- Teaser for your results – why should we listen to the rest of the talk?
 - Don't need a full outline, but let audience know enough so they want to listen to the rest
 - Unlike rabbit story, suspense is not good

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5

Guts of the Talk



- Explain what you did
 - Don't be comprehensive – convey the big picture
 - Use pictures, 1-2 examples, etc.
- Convey one technical nugget
 - Show one neat concrete thing that came out of your work
- Analysis
 - Did your work solve the problem?
 - What are the important results of your work

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6

Conclusions

- Summarize your project with one or two key points
- If your audience remembers one thing from your talk, you have succeeded
- If they remember two things (and you covered two things), you're doing really well

Some Specific Advice

- Average 2 minutes per slide
- Think carefully about the audience and what they know
- Use pictures
- Put at most five major bullets on your slides
- People should be able to read slides quickly – and then listen to you

Can You Do All This in 20



Minutes?

- Advertisers pay \$2.5M for 30 seconds during Superbowl – they must be pretty sure they can tell a compelling story in that time
- A *Friends* episode is 22 minutes long
- Make your points directly, avoid unnecessary details
- Organize your presentation
- Practice!
 - Without an audience
 - In front of your project group members
 - In front of friends not familiar with your project

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9

Dos and Don'ts for Presentations



Many mistakes are common to researchers

Here are a few to avoid

Do Not Read Transparencies

- The audience can read them without your help
- Your job is to interpret what the concise phrases mean by supplying explanations, examples, verbal descriptions, perspective, etc
- Tell us a story about the slides

Do Not Read Your Talk

- Use the transparencies as notes, but talk to the people
- Reading a paper or a speech is difficult; if it is not done well, it will be a catastrophe
- If you are reading too much, remove some words from your slides – that will force you to talk

Point at the Screen, Not the Projector



- A huge tube flying in front of the text is very distracting
- Even worse is pointing at a PC ... the audience cannot even see it!
- Most people do not handle light pens well; it takes a lot of experience to use them without distracting the audience
- Pencils and pens are too short to be effective; they force you to stand in front of the screen

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13

Anticipate the Questions



- While rehearsing, think of the ten most difficult and embarrassing questions you may be asked and prepare the answers
 - most of the actual questions won't be nearly as tough as these
- If you get a question you had not anticipated, that means you did not prepare adequately

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14

Keep Slide Animation Simple

- Lots of jumping, whirling, and flying looks cool ... to teenagers
- But it usually looks childish in a scientific talk
- Only use animation to improve the message of the talk
 - for example, to advance a concept one step at a time

Use Color Cautiously

- The key is to use high contrast, low contrast is very hard to read
- Remember that color will look different on different computers, and different when projected
- Cognitive scientists claim
 - dark text on light background is faster to read in print
 - light on dark is faster to read when projected
- Blue text is especially fuzzy

Answer Questions Clearly

- Repeat the question:
 - you can make sure you understood it
 - to give you time to think
 - to make sure the audience heard it
- Listen attentively and answer clearly even if the question was stupid
- Never ever **ever** get defensive
- Don't judge the questions; senior scientists don't need PhD students to tell them that they asked a "good question"

Learn From Other Speakers

- Pay attention to the delivery styles of both good and bad speakers
- When a talk is boring or over your head – think about the delivery
- Pay attention to characteristics of the room:
 - Does the sound carry well?
 - How is the lighting?

Stay in Control

- You can decide whether to answer questions at the beginning or end of the talk
- Allowing questions in the middle is dangerous because you might lose control
 - some people will try to disrupt your interview talk to see how you handle it.
- Don't let a "question" turn into a talk
- Remember, 90% of the audience wants you to tell the interrupting questioner to "just shut up"

Transparencies Must Be in Order

- Number the transparencies
 - They will stay in order
 - Audience can follow more easily
 - Audience can ask questions more easily
- After giving a talk, put the slides back in order
 - 5 minutes now saves 3 hours later

Pick Out People

- Do not stare at the session chair, teacher, or screen
- Pick out six to nine faces, equally distributed throughout the audience
- Speak to each and make eye contact
- Always look at some person when making an important point or conclusion
- You are talking to only one person at a time, and each person feels that you have been talking to him or her personally
- Lack of eye contact suggests evasiveness or lying

Speak Clearly and Assertively

- Do not use words that you do not understand
- Do not allow your voice to drop when you are dealing with controversial ideas
- Be assertive when you answer a question with "I don't know."
 - the audience will respect your honesty
 - the questioner usually knows you don't know already

Don't Worry About Pronunciation



- If English is not your native language, try to get the pronunciation right, but don't agonize over it
 - Remember: Everybody has an accent!
- If possible, rehearse with colleagues whose native language is English

Keep Them With You



- Keep your transparencies and notes with you in your briefcase or book bag
- you can practice on the plane
 - most importantly, if you lose your transparencies, your talk will be a disaster
 - if you are using a PC projector, keep a spare copy on a diskette flashdisk

Don't Fidget

- Try to stand fairly still and look comfortable
- Don't repeatedly check your watch, laugh nervously, wring your hands, or rock
- If your nerves show too much, the audience will start to think you're afraid that they'll find the flaws in your research – and start looking harder

Stimulants and Physical Comfort

- If you have a tendency to be nervous, your adrenaline level is high and the last thing you need is coffee
 - Don't drink it just to be polite
- Make sure to visit the toilet before your talk
- Be comfortable
 - Tight ties and high heels break your concentration
 - Shorts and Hawaiian shirts break your audience's concentration

Avoid Humor Unless You're Very



Good at it

- Humor backfires more often than it works
- Starting a technical talk with a joke doesn't work for most speakers
- Humor has its place and is appreciated if done well, but it takes a lot of practice and experience to do it right
- Making yourself the butt of the joke is always safest; making anyone else the butt of a joke is very risky

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27

Use a Timer



- Looking at your watch breaks the audience's concentration
- Use a traveling clock or put your watch on the table
- If you have rehearsed sufficiently, you will not need a clock!

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28

Be Yourself

- The most important thing you can do is to be yourself
- The above hints and notes are not intended to rework your personality for one talk
- You are speaking because you have something important to say and the people in your audience are there to hear you say it
- It is best said simply, casually, and without introducing artificialities