How to Give a Good Presentation

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Overview

- Motivation
  - why give a good talk?
- Preparation
  - content & timing
  - style
  - technology & logistics
- Delivery
  - what to do with parts of your anatomy
  - style
  - technology & timing
  - handling questions
- Postmortem
  - learning from your successes/mistakes

Only really useful on long talks, but can help orient the audience
Why Give a Good Talk?

*It’s more fun than a bad talk!*

“Average talks are forgotten quickly”
“Great talks are remembered for years”
“Terrible talks are remembered forever!”

After: D. Evans, ‘How to give a talk so good there will be pizza left for you’, UVa Theory Lunch, 25 January 2007. (http://www.cs.virginia.edu/evans/talks/talktalk/)

What’s Your Main Goal?

- Get to the end without passing out!
- Sell something
  - yourself, your group, your institution, your field
  - an idea, an approach, a direction
- It depends on the audience …
  - conference talk: *paper is worth reading*
  - lecture: *understand something interesting*
  - invited seminar: *believe something they didn’t before*

D. Evans, ‘How to give a talk so good there will be pizza left for you’, UVa Theory Lunch, 25 January 2007. (http://www.cs.virginia.edu/evans/talks/talktalk/)
The Audience

*Your goal is to wake them up and make them glad they came!*

- Will have read all your previous papers
- Thoroughly understand the background
- Can’t wait to hear your latest research results
- Are fully alert and ready to listen
- Have never heard of you or your work
- Vaguely remember reading something once
- Have mistakenly ended up in the wrong session
- Have just had lunch and are now ready to snooze

S. Peyton Jones, J. Launchbury, J. Hughes, ‘How to give a good research talk’, *SIGPLAN Notices* 28(11), Nov. 1993.

Preparation: *content*

- **What to include**
  - tell a story with a beginning, middle & end
  - cover a few key points well
    (rather than everything poorly)
  - overview (say what you’re going to say)
  - summary (say what you’ve said)
  - sufficient introductory material for non-experts
  - sufficient detailed material for experts

- **What not to include**
  - unnecessary detail
    (people will ask if they need more)
  - too many/any equations

- Ask yourself “what’s my main message?”
Preparation: **content**

For a scientific talk …

– introduce the **problem** that you are working on
– explain why this is an **interesting** or important problem
– describe what **previous work** has told us
– describe the **specific** problem that you are going to solve
– explain how you solved this problem
– explain how your work **pushes** forward our understanding
– discuss what are the **remaining open problems**


Preparation: **timing**

• Each slide will take 1½-2 minutes
  – i.e. 30 min. talk should have no more than ~20 content slides

• Use “**slide n of m**” so you’ll know where you are

• Contingencies
  – slides that can be skipped
  – slides that can be included
Preparation: **style**

- Aim for a consistent ‘look & feel’
  *(same font, layout, design)*
- Show creativity with your ideas
  *(not your font/colour choices)*
- Minimum of information on each slide
- Figures and diagrams are better than words
  *(but they need to be explained)*
- Make sure graphs are labelled

Preparation: **technology**

- Will you be able to use your own PC?
- If you’re using another machine and you have media files, use PPT ‘pack and go’/‘package for CD’
- Prepare a backup *(e.g. on a memory stick)*
- Arrange for any media to play automatically on the next ‘click’
  *(don’t rely on using the cursor)*
- Familiarise yourself with how to change the resolution of the display
- Consider recording yourself
PowerPoint: **use & abuse**

**Do’s**
- make sure each line carries a single point
- use large fonts (≥18pt)
- use/adapt a design template
- use animations wisely
- choose colour schemes carefully

**Don’ts**
- don’t use long paragraphs which spell out every last detail of a point even though you believe everything in there needs to be said and you feel that you might forget to make the point properly during your talk
- don’t use tiny fonts: no-one can read them
- don’t go overboard with colour schemes
- don’t use sound effects (they’re very annoying!)

Use dark colours on light backgrounds ...

... and light colours on dark backgrounds.

Research indicates that it is better to display all lines at once

This has been shown to be better than revealing them one at a time

Mahar et al (2009) found a significant difference between the means of overall student performance after viewing lectures with non-animated and animated slides

The presentations differed only in the presence of animation to incrementally present information

The study suggested that static slides allow the retention of more information than their dynamic counterparts

PowerPoint: *use & abuse*

Don’t go overboard with animations


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**Preparation: logistics**

- Before the day …
  - don’t prepare too far ahead (*it needs to be fresh*)
  - rehearse
    - in private (*in front of a mirror*)
    - in public (*with a friendlyish audience*)
  - fine tune before the main event
  - sleep well the night before
- On the day …
  - know when & where your talk takes place
  - arrive in good time
  - familiarise yourself with the setup
  - test the presentation
    - *especially any embedded sound & video*
  - make sure you have your backup copy with you
  - nervousness beforehand is good!
  - go to the loo
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Good technique to use in a long talk

- What to do with your **Body**:
  - don’t stand in front of the screen
  - move about (but don’t pace around unnecessarily)

- What to do with your **Hands**:
  - don’t point with the cursor (you may trigger other events)
  - point at the projection screen (not your laptop)
  - use a stick or laser pointer (but don’t wave it around)

- What to do with your **Face**:
  - smile
  - be visible (lip reading gives ~12dB SNR benefit)

- What to do with your **Eyes**:
  - maintain eye contact (with everyone!)
  - don’t concentrate on one person (esp. someone at the front)

- What to do with your **Voice**:
  - speak loudly and clearly (but don’t shout!)
  - speak to the audience (not the screen!)
  - don’t talk too fast (esp. if non-native audience)
  - be lively (don’t talk on a monotone)
Delivery: **style**

- **Read vs. spontaneous speech**
  - it’s better to talk than to read
  - don’t read out the slides, use them as prompts
  - memorise the opening and closing sentences
  - if you must have fully scripted notes, write them in a spoken style (complete with “OKs”, “so”, etc.)

- **What not to say …**
  - don’t apologise for anything (e.g. “my experiments didn’t go as well as I’d hoped”)
  - don’t improvise (it’ll take time you haven’t allowed for)
  - don’t make private remarks/jokes
  - avoid mannerisms (e.g. “you know”, “I mean”, “actually”)

- **Don’t overrun**
  (it’s selfish and rude)

- **Say “thank you” at the end**
  (so people know that you’ve finished)

Delivery: **technology**

- **How are you going to change the slides?**
  - be familiar with the relevant keypresses (especially how to go backwards)
  - is there a remote control? (make sure you know how to operate it)

- **Is there a microphone?**
  - it can boost self confidence
  - fixed, worn, handheld?
  - don’t bellow into it
  - if it’s handheld, don’t wave it around
  - if it’s fixed, make sure you talk into it
Delivery: **timing**

- Remember each slide is supposed to take 1.5-2 minutes … but each minute will appear to pass in ~10 secs!

- Keep track of the time
  - locate the room clock and note when you started
  - take off your watch and place it where you can see it
  - keep an eye on the slide number (so you know where you are)
  - keep an eye on the chairperson (they may be waving a red flag!)

- Contingencies
  - if time is running out, anticipate skipping some slides (don’t talk faster)
  - if you’re going too fast, slow down

Delivery: **handling questions**

1. Allow interruptions *(e.g. in a seminar)*
   - interaction is good
   - don’t lose control
   - helpful to have a chairperson

2. All at the end *(e.g. in a conference)*
   - leave enough time *(else none 😞)*
   - listen carefully *(some people ask several at once)*
   - check everyone has heard the question *(gives you time to think of an answer)*
   - answer truthfully *(“I don’t know” is OK)*
   - don’t be embarrassed to seek clarification
   - answering a different *(but related)* question can stimulate discussion
From Beginning to End …

- Remember to …
  - smile *(but don’t appear manic)*
  - stay calm *(but don’t fall asleep)*
  - breath *(but don’t hyperventilate)*
  - above all, enjoy it!

- Be …
  - confident
  - enthusiastic
  - amusing
  - committed
  - honest

After it’s All Over

- How did it go?
  - make a note of your own impressions
  - ask a friend what they thought
  - listen to the recording *(if you have one)*

- Update the talk
  *(you may be asked to do it again!)*

- Learn from the whole experience
  *(it’ll be even better next time)*

- Learn from others
  *(what to do and what *not* to do)*

- Congratulate yourself … *you survived!*
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A reminder of what I've been talking about (in case you were asleep)

Where to Find Out More

http://www.d.umn.edu/~jgallian/goodPPtalk.pdf

http://www.si.umich.edu/~pne/PDF/howtotalk.pdf
Thank you

Any Questions?