

## Top tips for excellent presentations

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(Building on work by many others!)

### Structure

- Keep to time! Check in advance how long you have (20 minutes conference, 45 minutes invited talk, 5 minutes speed-presentation)
- One idea (max 2) per presentation.  
You cannot say everything, so 'kill your darlings': reason from what your goal is, what is necessary for the audience to reach that stage, and omit anything that is nice but does not contribute to the goal. So you can think: At the end of your presentation, what should people have learned? What will they tell their colleagues over coffee about you and your talk? Then: what is necessary information to reach that goal?
- Make it into a story, for example:
  - The funnel: start broad with sth everybody knows (putting the work in context), and narrow down to your specific research question (ideally also broaden again at the end to show how your research is relevant for the bigger question).
  - The fairytale: start with a main character (e.g. you) and explain what they want. Present 2 or 3 ways which do not work, then come to the epiphany, show that this does work, and summarise to live happily ever after.
  - The spoiler: start with the solution and then show how/why you got there.
- Signposting
  - Use the sandwich method: tell them what you're going to tell them, then tell them, then tell them what you've told them
  - give an outline/roadmap
  - ask (rhetorical) questions
  - summarise in between
  - give a clear take-home message
  - refer to Q&A if you want to talk more about a particular subject

### Audience

- Do not ever begin with an apology. You are there, you have something to say, and you do that to the best of your ability. Apologies, if needed at all – typically they are not – can follow afterwards.
- What do the audience know?
  - In order to find the right level and make sure people are on board, you can for example check with the organisers in advance, create space to ask questions in between, ask the audience at the start what they know
  - For a general audience, avoid technical terms (incl. acronyms and abbreviations) and spell out the assumptions and the background
  - For a specialised audience, this is not necessary. Instead, do not lose too much time on stuff they are likely/expected to know.
- Is it worth their time? People are likely tired and have tons of other things to do, so:
  - Make explicit why this is interesting and relevant
  - Make it (moderately) entertaining
  - Make it personal

- Interaction
  - *You* decide how much interaction you want during the talk
  - You can always check how things are ('is it too warm here?', 'I see some frowning')
  - Let people get used to your voice (i.e. start by easy introduction)
  - Remember that a resting face is not necessarily angry or bored
- Answering questions
  - Try to foresee likely questions
  - Treat all questions seriously (the off-topic question might be from your future employer who nodded off for a moment)
  - If you really can't understand, say so
  - If you really don't know, say so, and why
  - Be concise & don't ramble (the questioner can ask for more, but you can't retrieve spent time)
  - Be mentally prepared that your talk is only over AFTER the questions (or else your concentration drops after the talk and you have a hard time understanding the questions)
  - Remember that it is your idea that is being questioned, not you. You can grow and learn from (even very harsh or hard) questions.
- Make sure you have your name and e-mail somewhere (ideally in a handout)

### **Speaker**

- Voice
  - Project but do not force
  - Don't be afraid to pause
  - Use wider pitch range than usual
  - Use pace
- Body
  - Face the audience, do not turn towards your slides – your back is less interesting
  - Look at the whole audience, not the same individuals the whole time. You can even look slightly above them if you have trouble looking at people.
  - Body posture can communicate a lot! The body language must be congruent with the message. Do not cross your arms. Try the 'Harvard pose' in advance if you feel insecure.
  - Don't fidget (pen, hair, shirt, pointer).
- Dress & Act
  - Stand up (don't sit)
  - Do not read
  - The way you dress will influence people's impression of you
  - The way you dress might influence the talk: what draws the attention?
  - Act smart and capable
  - Know how to end a presentation: 'Thank you' is a good point to stop talking.

### **Infrastructure**

- Room
  - You can rearrange it according to audience and type of talk
  - You can manage temperature, fresh air, light

- Technicalities
  - Check if there is a computer or you use your own
  - Check compatibility between own computer
  - Check microphone if needed
- Water – you never know whether you need it; your mouth tends to get dry while talking
- Be there
  - Be on time, know where you need to be
  - Stay for the session
  - Concentrate on what is happening at that moment

### **Visual support**

- You have a choice: to beam or not to beam
  - YOU are the talk, the slides are for support
  - It is a visual aid, so think about how you can visually represent your information ('a picture says more than a thousand words')
- Slides
  - Do not have too much text on a slide
  - Avoid slide transitions
  - Avoid silly or distracting templates
  - Do use animations to dose the information and steer the audience's attention
  - Check for time: 1 minute per slide (and calibrate this as you give more talks)
  - You can use extra slides after the last one to have data at hand that may help answer questions
  - You may have both a handout and slides (in fact, that is ideal for me) – make sure in that case that the example numbers are the same.
- Font
  - sans serif (Arial, Calibri, Helvetica) easier to read; stick to one font
  - provide high contrast between text and background (no red on black, or yellow on light blue)
  - avoid font sizes <18 pt
  - avoid using all uppercase text (more difficult to read)
  - if using IPA or other fonts: EMBED fonts in the file when saving (File> Options>Save> Embed)
- When preparing for a recorded video, think about where the speaker is displayed and avoid putting information there (e.g. top right corner)
- Check spelling

### **Practice!**

- Practice alone (or to your stuffed animals) until you're within the time limit
- Practice until you know the structure of the presentation (no 'next slide surprise') – the more automatic things go, the more mental capacity you have to interact, to adjust, etc.
- Present it to friends and colleagues
- Ask for feedback, and decide whether to act upon it