

# Elements of a good talk

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## Designing Content into a Good Talk

- People come to your talk to learn something, either content or how you think. Keep it simple (KISS), repeat your point(s), limit yourself to one point/theme if possible.
- Your talk is a “taste” of your research. Keep to the general research organization principle: Motivation (Problem Statement), Approach, Method, Summary (Conclusion/Lessons Learned)
- For a technical talk, pick at most one area to go into depth
- Equations are a great tool if used as an illustration
- Use examples to make your point relevant to the audience

## Preparation for a good talk

- Make slides after your talk is made
- Practice for timing (2-3 minutes per slide? BOGUS!)

## Delivering a good talk

- Arrive early
- Never apologize
- Don't run long – if necessary, write a full script
- Point at the projected screen – not your laptop (laser pointers aren't that great)

(From Bruce Donald, Dartmouth)

- Do not use a pointer.

*A pointer seems particularly useful if you cannot reach the projection. Those laser pointer things seem totally cool, too, don't they? Well, they're annoying and should be outlawed. Why?*

*Pointers are guaranteed to annoy at least 35% of your audience.*

*If you're nervous, the pointer dramatically magnifies the shaking of your hand. It looks like you're conducting an orchestra or something. That leaves a bad impression. Even if you're not nervous, it still jiggles unpleasantly. This is why wooden pointers, folding pointers, and laser pointers are all equally bad.*

*People cannot find where a laser points very quickly. You probably zip it around and circle things. You're making your audience dizzy. Or you say "like this here" and they don't see where you point because the laser is already somewhere else. Disgusting habit.*

*Very few speakers are capable of speaking without playing with the thing that's in their hands. It's distracting. Watch the speaker who folds and*

*unfolds the pointer repeatedly. Yuck. You shouldn't have things in your hands. Period.*

*A Fine Point: Using your shadow is infinitely better than using a pointer. But, if you can reach the screen, you should touch it (the screen) to point to things, instead of using your shadow. The audience will like the tactility of this gesture.*

*It's ok if your hand makes a slight noise when you hit the screen, or the screen shakes. This discontinuity may wake a few people up. Seriously.*

- Don't pace, sit, fidget
  - Don't "undress" in front of audience
  - Thank your host, compliment your audience, cite local work
- (From Gian-Carlo Rota, "Ten lessons I wish I had been taught")

- Give lavish acknowledgments

*I have always felt miffed after reading a paper in which I felt I was not being given proper credit, and it is safe to conjecture that the same happens to everyone else. One day, I tried an experiment. After writing a rather long paper, I began to draft a thorough bibliography. On the spur of the moment, I decided to cite a few papers which had nothing whatsoever to do with the content of my paper, to see what might happen.*

*Somewhat to my surprise, I received letters from two of the authors whose papers I believed were irrelevant to my article. Both letters were written in an emotionally charged tone. Each of the authors warmly congratulated me for being the first to acknowledge their contribution to the field.*

## **Designing a Good Presentation**

- **Include the date and your name on all talks**
- **Color** – be aware of how your colors reproduce (projection and paper). Choose a background that has medium luminance (parchment, light gray).
  - Don't use Red on Bright Blue background. Keep good contrast, but don't over saturate. Use a desaturated yellow instead of white or bright yellow.
  - Dark backgrounds don't Xerox well, but can be good in auditorium settings. Navy-ish blue or purple with desaturated yellow is a good choice.
- **Layout** – default values in powerpoint are too large. You don't need the title area of a slide. Beware of icon-central. Sometimes this is necessary for funding agents. Less layout is better.
- **Slide Animation Tricks** – in overhead projector days, this was called the striptease. I rarely use slide effects. I limit it to "punchline" items, or overlay needs. Don't make your bullets appear one at a time.
- **To Use an Outline... or not?** – Opinions vary on this. I believe in outlines, but they should be filled with content... not just a list of "motivation, method, conclusion" For long talks, I use the outline slide as a gauge throughout the talk

of where we are, and a reminder to recap what we've done so far. I really like the "icons across the bottom of the page" technique.

- **Text and/or Images** – Nowadays, slides are both "live" and "archived". Text is necessary for the archival mission of slides. This information is lost when only an image is displayed. The best solution is to use the "notes" section when publishing slides. The defacto solution is to add text to a slide with an image.
- **Text** – when using text, make sure it is big enough, but not too big. Can you read the paper if it's on the floor and you're standing above it? Use size appropriately for supporting vs. primary information. Use complete sentences. Bullets are okay if your text is showing 1) a linear progression, 2) a list of categories. However, text boxes are better with arrows showing causality and analytic progression between the thoughts.
- **Images/Illustrations** – The best use of slides is the creation of illustrations. These can be based on images, movies, text and glyphs.
- **Props** – The absolute best thing you can do is a live experiment proving your point. For example, consider the pre-attentive target finding. Props are an excellent mechanism.
- **Recycling Slides** – generally doesn't work. My best talks require fresh slides every time. Reusing an entire talk is okay.
- **Handouts** – Bring a one page handout. On this handout, you should have an iconic image. Your name, title of your talk/paper, short description of your point, contact information, a URL is best, and a list of references, **and THE DATE**

## Further Reading

My favorite site:

<http://www.anu.edu.au/BoZo/Scott/SharonTalks.html>

These are interesting

<http://www-2.cs.cmu.edu/afs/cs.cmu.edu/user/mleone/web/how-to.html>

<http://research.microsoft.com/Users/simonpj/papers/giving-a-talk/giving-a-talk-html.html#About>

<http://www.cs.dartmouth.edu/~brd/Teaching/Giving-a-talk/giving-a-talk.html>

Not all advice is good advice. I disagree with much of this site

[http://home.sandiego.edu/~kaufmann/envi\\_mars195/handout.html](http://home.sandiego.edu/~kaufmann/envi_mars195/handout.html)