Giving Effective Presentations

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The Four Steps to Success

1. Decide what to say
2. Make slides
3. Practice
4. Give a talk
### The Four Steps to Success

1. Decide what to say
2. Make slides
3. Practice and Revise
4. Give the talk
DECIDING WHAT TO SAY
First, understand your topic

• Read a **secondary source** (e.g., textbook) to figure out the key ideas, how they fit into the big picture
• Check **another** secondary source or two to get more clarity and a more balanced view
• Go back to **original sources**
• Look for **more recent work** that has built on or applied the concepts you’ll present
Next, think about your audience

• What do you think the audience already knows, and what do they need to know?
  – don’t talk over their heads, don’t bore them

• How can you make your presentation interactive to help them connect to the topic?
  – puzzles
  – games
  – polls
Organize all of this into a talk

- Decide which ideas are most important
  - structure the talk around these
  - don’t confuse these with the technical details

- Create a talk outline. For example:
  - Introduction: the big picture
    - what problem is solved?
    - why did this problem need to be solved?
    - how does the solution work?
  - Formal description of the solution
  - Evidence that the solution works (proof; experiments)
  - Comparisons to other approaches [sometimes comes second]
  - Summary
MAKING SLIDES
Outline!

• Make a slide-by-slide outline
• **Refine** it until it’s perfect
  – much easier than changing polished slides later
• If a slide is getting too complex, **split it** in two
• Ensure the **key points** get delivered early
• Make sure the **flow is logical**
The most common mistake:
- too much time on technical details
- too little time on context

Context:
- what is the big idea?
- what problem does it solve?
- why is this problem important to solve?
- how does it differ from other alternatives?
Slides: Organization

• Make the talk’s structure easy to figure out
  – outline slides
  – verbal reminders and transitions
• One point per slide
• Each slide organized like an outline:
  main points
  – sub points
• Keep text as brief as possible
Slides: Design

- **Clarity is the most important thing**
  - your slides don’t need to be beautiful, just effective

- Legible

- Not too **cluttered**
  - while they’re reading, they’re not listening

- Visually **interesting**
  - colour
  - pictures (but make a point, don’t distract)

- Usually **1-3 minutes** per slide
PRACTICING AND REVISING
Practice!

• Memorize the **first little bit** (but not the rest)
• Actually **practice out loud**
  – don’t just read it in your head
  – have a real audience (but not the first time)
    • have your friend make notes and critique afterwards
  – practice it *at least* 3 times
  – time yourself
• **Change your talk** based on what doesn’t work when you practice
GIVING THE TALK
Getting started

• People will **decide in the first 60 seconds** whether or not to pay attention to your talk

• Help them answer the questions **“Why should I listen to this?”** and **“Why does this matter?”**

• A technical talk is **not a mystery novel**
  – Don’t build to a suspenseful conclusion
  – Tell them the punchline as quickly as possible
  – The rest of the talk is delivering on this promise
Rhetoric

• Don’t **read** your slides
• **Repeat** points that are important
  – this ensures they don’t get missed
  – this communicates that they are important
• Walk them slowly through **figures and graphs**
  – explain what the axes mean
  – tell them what conclusion they should draw
• Welcome **interruptions**
• Know when to **stop**
Engage with the Audience

• Start from the assumption that people find talks **boring**, and strive to overcome that boredom
• You’re allowed to **interact** with the audience or talk directly to specific people
  – they’re living, human beings, and you’re not a recording
• Ask rhetorical **questions** (or real questions)
• Make **eye contact**
• Model **their perspective** and discuss it in the talk
  – help them understand why you’re talking about the thing you’re talking about
  – anticipate places they’ll get stuck understanding concepts
  – anticipate their intuitions (both correct and incorrect)
Speaking

• Speak up
• Speak slowly
• Be **energetic and enthusiastic**
• Use **emphasis**; avoid monotone
• Use **natural**, conversational language
• If you’re not a native speaker, practice for one and have them point out mispronunciations
• If you say “**um**” (etc), try replacing with pauses
• **Film yourself** and find out how you look and sound
Overcoming Nervousness

- Be well practiced
- If you draw a blank, looking at your slides will help
- Taking a deep breath when you need to calm down
- Slow down
- Long pauses are OK
- If you must, bring (one page of) notes
- Think about questions in advance
  - …but it’s OK not to know the answer (“That’s a great question”)

Decide What to Say  Make Slides  Practice and Revise  Give the Talk
How to Give an Effective Presentation

1. **Decide What to Say**
   - Plan your material, taking the audience into account
   - Make a high-level outline

2. **Make Slides**
   - Make a lower-level outline, emphasizing big ideas
   - Clarity is more important than being flashy

3. **Practice and Revise**
   - At least three times, out loud
   - Change your slides based on what doesn’t work

4. **Give the Talk**
   - Start strong, letting the audience know why they care
   - Be engaging, energetic, and easy to listen to
Sources

- http://www.matthewjmiller.net/ramblings/presentation-tips/