

Tips for Giving a Talk

Preparation and Structure

- Know your material thoroughly.
- What is your audience expecting? Find out and pitch your talk accordingly.
- Select material carefully: less is more. Select the important information and ideas that your audience needs to know and can absorb in the time. People can ask you questions at the end if they want to know more.
- What is your overall message? If someone were to explain your talk to a friend, what do you want that person to say?
- Plan the structure of your talk. Are you beginning with a question which you will then proceed to answer? Are you taking the audience through a process or a logical sequence of ideas? If you begin with the big picture, narrow down swiftly to your own particular topic. Remember to return to the big picture at the end.
- Think of the type of questions you may be asked and prepare answers in advance.
- When you rehearse, focus on the sense of what you need to communicate, not the particular words of your script.
- Rehearse at least twice, preferably in front of a friend who can give you constructive feedback.

We are all nervous about giving talks, but they are an important method of communicating academic ideas.

PowerPoint

- Can any of the information in your talk be better presented in visual or graphic form? If so, use PowerPoint or some other means of presenting visual information. Show pictures, maps, graphs, data, and photos. Use headings to show your talk's structure, but avoid slides full of text.
- Do not begin with a set of PowerPoint slides and structure the talk around them. The slides are not the talk. If the technology fails, you should still be able to deliver a good talk.

Essential shortcuts

F5 start show
Esc stop
Space next slide
left previous slide
b black screen
w white screen
F1 Help
Home Beginning of show
End End of show

- Never read the text on your slides to your audience; they can probably read for themselves (and read more quickly than you can read aloud).
 - Do not use long bulleted lists. They tempt you to oversimplify complex ideas.
 - When choosing fonts, avoid Arial and Times (especially Times Bold). Microsoft has created several new fonts intended for screen display: Georgia, Verdana, and Trebuchet. **Arial Black** is also worth considering as a bold heading font.
 - There is no absolute size rule for fonts; it depends on the size of the room, the screen, and the projector. However, 30 point is a good minimum, and it will prevent you from putting too much text on the screen. Have someone with glasses read out your text from the back of the room.
 - Learn to Hide and Show the pointer, to right-click to go to a slide by title, and (especially) to show the pen, draw, erase, and hide the pointer again. All these are available by right-clicking when the show is running.
 - To start a presentation, A) right-click on the file and choose Show, or B) Save As type > PowerPoint Show, and double-click that file: both avoid you having to launch the presentation in design view. If it is already open, F5 starts the show, Shift-F5 starts it from the current slide (Control-Shift-S and Control-Shift-B respectively on a Mac), and Esc stops it.
- Finish by using the W or B key to create a blank screen or leave up your favourite graphic during questions.
 - Do not always use PowerPoint just because you can: "The best talks I have ever heard had no slides at all." – Donald Norman

Practise

- It is very rude to exceed your allotted time. Put time markers into your talk. Make the section of your talk immediately preceding your conclusion optional, and practise jumping straight to the conclusion if you are behind your schedule.
- Practise in front of people and preferably in the room where you will actually perform.
- If you can, consider videoing yourself. Watch your performance and identify ways of improving.
- Walk through your presentation in the actual room, on the actual computer, if you can. Changing from the computer on which you made your presentation can often affect graphics, fonts, and film clips. Test the lights, volume, and AV controls. Practise using the microphone in a large room.
- If you possibly can, run your PowerPoint from your own laptop (but practise connecting it to the projector so that goes seamlessly). If this is not possible, test every slide well ahead of time, and avoid complex video or sound.

Delivery

- If you think that your audience will need it, provide a handout. This is good for very detailed material, definitions or contact details. Never just print your slides, unless you are asked to do so.
- Address the audience in the second person (*you*), so that they are part of a conversation.
- Dress like a professional. Visual impressions are important.
- If you are performing in a large room, use the microphone.
- Gestures are fine if they come naturally to you and help to communicate your meaning. Avoid pre-rehearsed movements.
- If possible, move out from behind the lectern or desk and move closer to your audience.
- Make eye contact with different people in the room, not forgetting those at the back and down the sides.
- Speak naturally, as though to a single person.
- Do not read your script. Know your material well enough to be able to look up most of the time, but do not learn it by rote and recite it.
- If you know that you speak very quickly, try to slow down.
- If there is a chance that the audience may have problems with your pronunciation, find a native speaker to coach you.
- Factor pauses into your talk: they are especially effective before and after important statements.
- Do not try to talk over noise, such as coughing. Wait until it has stopped before resuming your talk.
- Stand to the left of the screen because people read from left to right and you want them to start by looking at you.
- Do not feel threatened by questions; instead, think of question time as a chance for an interactive conversation with the audience. Ask them questions in return. If you do not know the answer to a question, never pretend that you do.

Being enthusiastic and smiling are key parts of a good talk. Both are infectious.

Nerves

- Research your material thoroughly, so that you are confident that you are delivering good content
- Research breathing techniques for relaxation: they are surprisingly effective
- Try to go for a walk or take some exercise before you present
- Do not overdose on caffeine: it can increase nervousness
- Eat a good breakfast on the day you give your talk (and lunch, if it is in the afternoon)
- Imagine that you are talking to one person
- Practise, practise, practise.