

## Guidelines for Good Oral Presentations

By: Joe Orlins, Civil and Environmental Engineering, Rowan University

Adapted from: *Oral Presentation Advice*, by Mark Hill

<http://www.cs.wisc.edu/~markhill/conference-talk.html>

**Consider your audience.** Who are you speaking to? Your classmates? A group of professors? Industry sponsors? Professionals at a conference? The style and level of detail for your talk may be very different for each of these groups.

**Consider the goals for your presentation.** What do you want the audience to remember when they leave? One or two key elements is likely all they *will* remember, so make them worthwhile – you **do** want them to remember the subject and who you are, you **don't** want them to remember that you got confused while presenting and showed the wrong slides.

**Remember – Oral Presentations are Different than Written Reports.** Listeners have one chance to hear your talk and can't "re-read" when they get confused. In many situations, they have or will hear several talks on the same day. Being clear is particularly important if the audience can't ask questions during the talk. There are two well-know ways to communicate your points effectively. The first is to K.I.S.S. (keep it simple, stupid). Focus on getting one to three key points across. Think about how much you remember from a talk last week. Second, repeat key insights: tell them what you're going to tell them (Forecast), tell them, and tell them what you told them (Summary).

### Generic Classroom Presentation Outline

The following outline is a suggestion for most classroom talks of 10-15 minutes. For this type of presentation, good speakers average one minute per slide (not counting title and outline slides), and thus use about a dozen slides for a ten minute presentation.

- **Title / authors** (1 slide)
- **Forecast** (0-1 slide, optional) *Give gist of problem attacked and insight found (What is the one idea you want people to leave with? This is the "abstract" of an oral presentation.)*
- **Outline of presentation** (0-1 slide, optional) *Tell the audience what you will tell them.*
- **Background** (1-3 slides)
  - **Motivation and problem statement** (1-2 slides) *Why should anyone care about your subject?*
  - **Prior knowledge** (0-2 slides) *What is already known about the subject? A very brief overview to help orient the listener can be helpful.*
- **Key findings** (4-6 slides) *This is where you tell the audience what you really found out, whether it is laboratory research or a literature review.*
- **Summary** (1 slide) *Tell the audience what you told them, in a brief, succinct manner.*

Remember, these are just guidelines! The key to a successful presentation is to practice, practice, practice!

## **How to Give a Bad Talk**

David A. Patterson

*Computer Science Division, University of California-Berkeley, Circa 1983*

*(With annotations from Mark D. Hill, liberally adapted by Joe Orlins)*

### **Ten Commandments**

**I. Thou shalt not be neat.** Why waste study or research time preparing slides? Ignore spelling, grammar and legibility. Also, dress in the clothes you wore last weekend when you played rugby in the mud. Who cares what 50 people think?

**II. Thou shalt not waste space.** Slides and transparencies are expensive. If you can cram more stuff onto each slide, you'll save money – and be able to cover more information in 12 slides!

**III. Thou shalt not covet brevity.** Do you want to continue the stereotype that engineers can't write? Always use complete sentences, never just key words. If possible, use whole paragraphs and read every word.

**IV. Thou shalt use many different sounds and animations in slide transitions.** You need the dynamic element! Besides, the features are available in PowerPoint for a reason – to be used!

**V. Thou shalt not be legible.** Be humble - use a small font. Don't label axes on graphs, and use fancy typefaces. Important people sit in front, and will see just fine. Who cares about the riff-raff that sits in the back of the room?

**VI. Thou shalt not use color.** Flagrant use of color indicates careless research. It's also unfair to emphasize some words over others.

**VII. Thou shalt not illustrate.** Confucius says "A picture = 10K words," but Dijkstra (a computer programmer) says, "Pictures are for weak minds." Who are you going to believe? Wisdom from the ages, or the person who first counted goto's?

**VIII. Thou shalt not make eye contact.** You should avert your eyes to show respect. In addition, speak softly and in a monotone voice, to show respect and not wake the riff-raff sleeping in the back of the room. Standing in front of the screen can also add mystery.

**IX. Thou shalt not skip slides in a long talk.** You prepared the slides; people came for your whole talk; so just talk faster. Skip your summary and conclusions, if necessary.

**X. Thou shalt not practice.** Why waste study or research time practicing a talk? It could take several hours out of your busy week. How can you appear spontaneous if you practice? If you do practice, argue with any suggestions you get and make sure your talk is longer than the time you have to present it.