

Final Presentation Pointers

Let me start off by saying ML final presentations will have to comply to my requirements for technical and logistical content. That said, below is a list of some suggestions you might find useful for presentations/pitches in general - feel free to use the suggestions for the ML course. **If there is a contradiction between what I require and what is stated below, what I require will take precedence :)**

Presentation Rules

1. In the first 30 seconds, tell us the problem you are solving. (The 1st half of "start strong")
2. Within the next 30 seconds, outline your solution. (The 2nd half of "start strong")
3. Don't bore us at any stage of your presentation.
4. Don't appear bored when presenting. Show your passion. Modulate your voice. Show some energy.
5. Don't read your slides out loud. EVER.
6. Slow down. (Not necessary for all of you, but for many.)
7. 10-20-30 Rule* for PowerPoint slides (max of 10 slides, 20 minutes, font size not less than 30 point)
8. Consider making a handout for your audience (w/enough copies) rather than show PowerPoints that contain too much or too little information.**
9. Remember, your audience may know NOTHING about your topic.
10. Your audience can't read and listen at the same time.
11. Your audience can't memorize on the fly. Technical terms, if they must be used at all, may need to be repeated during your presentation.

* Guy Kawasaki of Apple, Inc.

** Edward Tufte, "The Cognitive Style of PowerPoint"

Ack: Prof. Alan Wolf, Physics

Comments on, and examples of, some of the above points:

* Many of the items I listed above work together. For example, you can talk more slowly (a good thing) if you remove much unnecessary detail.

* In the first 30 seconds, tell us the problem you are solving. Simple, short, declarative sentences. ("Sally owns a cat. Her cat's name is Luna. It has black fur.")

* If I'm not engaged within the first 60 seconds, I'm not listening to you. I'm waiting for your presentation to end. Attention is a fragile thing.

* Don't recite the names and responsibilities of a dozen team members. You can put this info on a slide, but don't read it aloud. Really, we don't care and it is boring.

* If presenting a design, don't dive into details of subassemblies if you haven't shown us (within the first minute!) a diagram that shows the overall device.

* Your audience can't read and listen at the same time. If you put up a slide with 100's of words, AND you are talking rapidly about that content, we can't read the slide and listen to you. We may give up and do neither. We are in a presentation coma.

* Contemplate removing 90% of what you think we need to know. Don't overwhelm us with details. We don't need to know about every idea you contemplated and rejected. Don't use your presentation to try to convince us (or your Prof.) that you did a lot of work. If the audience wants more info about any part of your presentation, they can ask questions. Have EXTRA SLIDES prepared with the details, IN CASE THEY ASK. Don't show them unless questions arise.

* Remember, your audience knows NOTHING about your topic. (Take that to be true, even if it isn't.) It is easy to forget that your audience knows nothing about, e.g., prosthetic limbs. They aren't you.

*** Slow down. This is the most frequent comment we make to students in Invention Factory. Sometimes we need to say it a dozen times within the first few minutes of a presentation.**

* No chartjunk. Logos, borders, cute images – they distract and annoy us.

* Your audience can't memorize on the fly. Technical terms, if they must be used at all, may need to be repeated during your presentation. If you explain what vorticity is on slide 2, am I expected to remember it by slide 10? Your live presentation is not a printed document where I can go back to earlier sections.