

Physics 174: Advice for Presentations

Considerations in your presentations:

Target time: 25-30 minutes plus questions.

DO prepare slides. It's hard for me to imagine a good talk on a research paper that doesn't include at least one diagram or photo and at least one graph of data.

Frame the question or problem. Introduce us to the experiment and the physical phenomenon investigated in it. What specific puzzle were they trying to solve about it?

Orient us. Show photos, diagrams, and/or important theory relationships that relate to the investigation. Label the pictures to show key objects or quantities. Define variables, either on the picture(s) or in words.

DON'T write paragraphs. You will be speaking to us in words, and most of us can't listen to one sentence and read another at the same time.

Convince us. Think of the investigation as a detective story. Show us the evidence and convince us to agree with their interpretation of what is going on. (There is an assumption here that the paper provides a reasonable interpretation. Occasionally if you continue in research you may find yourself giving a "journal club" presentation on a paper you disagree with which would be a different type of detective story. However, this is unlikely to be the case here.) Data presented graphically or pictorially is usually way easier to absorb than tables of numbers.

It's not quite a courtroom. OK, you convinced us. But be clear and explicit about anything that was presented in the paper as uncertain. We'll feel more secure about the main result if we see that the work was evaluated (by both the authors and you) in an appropriately critical way.

USE your final slide. We'll be staring at your final slide while we applaud and ask you questions. We don't really want to stare at "Questions?" or "The End." Make the final slide a good reminder of the main content of your talk... or make it (appropriately) funny.

Practice with your slides. Know what you want to say for each slide, and be ready to say it confidently and engagingly. Nothing wins over an audience like an impression that you yourself are interested in what you're saying. You can be very informal with us if that is a comfortable style for you. You should not plan to read your talk from a piece of paper or from the slides (but it is okay to have some notes).

Check that your slides are right for your talk. Make sure your slides contain the images and info that you would like to point to as you speak. Make sure your slides don't contain images and info that are actually irrelevant to your talk...