

Tips for a successful presentation

(RELEASEd v.1.2 – 3 February 2013)

This document provides some guidelines that can help you in giving a successful scientific presentation.

- The first obvious tip is to read this document carefully before or while preparing your presentation. We make such documents to help you, please use them wisely.

COME WELL-PREPARED

- *Know* what you are talking about. Make sure you really understand in depth the matter you are presenting. *You* are supposed to be the expert. You have to convince or involve your audience.

SET THE CONTEXT

- Always set the context first. (What has been done before?)
- What is the purpose of this talk? (Why are we having this presentation?)
- What do you want the reader to get out of it? (What is the message you want to convey?)
- What do you want to get out of it? (What kind of feedback do you desire?)

BE CONCRETE

- Be as *concrete* as possible to keep your audience attentive and interested.
- Well-chosen concrete *examples* often work better than abstract phrases.
- Examples will force you to focus on the essence; you cannot hide behind words.
- Examples may also allow you to go into more detail while limiting the risk of losing your audience: even if they would get lost in some of the technicalities they can always fall back upon their intuitive understanding of the example.
- Why not give a concrete example first and keep the more conceptual discussion and conclusion for later, or present even the discussion and conclusion in terms of the example?
- You can also use counter-examples. Sometimes a negative example can illustrate things better than a positive one.

USE A RUNNING EXAMPLE (if possible)

- Related to the previous point, the technique of using a *running example* can be useful to make your slides more concrete, less boring and attractive to the audience.
- Show the motivation, problem, solution and discussion all on the same running example that you develop throughout the slides.

USE PICTURES

- *Illustrate* your slides with (concrete) images, schema's and examples.
- A well-chosen picture can say more than a thousand words.
- Avoid having (too many) pictures that are only decoration.

BE CONCISE

- Focus on the essence.
- *Limit* the amount of information per slide. Don't make your slides too dense.
- Do *not* show long and boring *lists of bullets* if you can think of a better way to convey the same information (image, schema, example, ...).
- A good rule of thumb is to count max. 3 slides per 4 minutes.
- Don't spend too much time on the same slide... if you need too much time for one slide maybe something is wrong with the presentation: maybe the order in which you present things is wrong or you are missing examples or you are missing slides that give more detail.

BE ORIGINAL

- Show a sense of creativity in the way you present things, for example:
 - by using an interesting analogy with real-life to explain something;
 - by getting your audience actively involved in your presentation;
 - by presenting known material in a novel and unexpected way.
- Keep it easy on the animations and fancy layouts though (that's not the kind of creativity we are looking for), they are only an excuse for drawing away the reader's attention from the essence.

SLIDE APPEARANCE

- *Number your slides!* This is important for the audience, so that if they want to ask questions later on they can refer to the correct slides.
- *Avoid spelling errors.* (Reread your slides for spelling errors and use a spell checker.)
- Make your text and pictures *big enough* so that they are easily readable for your audience, even those in the back of the room.

RESPECT THE ALLOCATED TIME

- Make sure you know up front how much time you will get to present and stick exactly to that. Make sure to try out the presentation at home to avoid running out of time.
- Leave sufficient time for questions. After all, getting feedback is one of the main reasons for presenting something.
- Related to that, make sure to ask at least one interesting question about the others' presentations. There is nothing more frustrating than getting no feedback after a presentation, so do them a favour and ask a question.