How to Give a Good Oral Scientific Presentation

By Martha Dahlen, The Graduate School, Tsinghua University (madh@jps.net)

Be motivated. A good presentation will advance science, enhance your institution's reputation, reflect well on your department., your supervisor, and you.

Start with the end in mind.
1. Know the level of your audience, the equipment available, and the time limit.
2. Focus efforts according to your goal. The nature of the presentation and the nature of the audience make *the visual part of your presentation the most important.*

Organize.
1. Focus your talk on 1-3 main points. *"What should the audience remember?"*
2. The usual structure of a scientific paper works well here too: Intro/Background; Objectives; Procedure or Methods; Results; Discussion; Conclusions
3. Limit "Background" and "Methods"; the audience is primarily interested in your results.

Plan the graphics (PowerPoint presentation).
1. Plan on one slide per minute of your talk.
2. The first slide should be the title of your paper, authors, institution, addresses.
3. The middle slides should match the (logical) flow of your talk.
4. The last slide should be a short list of conclusions.

Design the slides (PowerPoint frames).
Text:
1. Each slide should either illustrate one point or summarize several points.
2. Make slides simple. *"If a slide cannot be understood in 4 seconds, it is a bad slide."*
3. In general, use key words; do not write complete sentences.

Tables/Graphs
1. Prepare tables and graphs specifically for oral presentations.
2. In general, graphs convey information more efficiently than tables.
3. Use color if/where appropriate to highlight or link similar ideas.

Technical Aspects:
1. Design slides to be slightly wider than tall.
2. Use no more than eight lines per slide, with double spacing between lines.
3. Use no more than 50 words per slide.
4. Use a type style that is easy to read and attractive. Sans serif styles generally look "cleaner". Compare the following : (next page)
   This is a serifed style called Times New Roman.
   The text of this handout is in a sans serif style called Arial.

5. Use a large font size.
6. Do a spell-check on all text in your slides before giving the presentation.

REHEARSE!! REVISE!! REHEARSE!!

Stand & deliver!

1. Take a pointer.
2. Dress neatly; a suit or sport coat is usually most appropriate.
3. Before your talk, become familiar with the room, the equipment, the procedure, the order of speakers. Know the time limit and when the warning sign will be given.
4. Stand near the projection screen; face the audience.
5. Speak slowly, loudly, distinctly. Use notes on cards for reference, but avoid reading. (*Hint: Choose a person in the last row of the room and speak to him or her.*)
6. Slides should supplement what you are saying. That is, what is showing in the slide should match what you are saying but not merely repeat it. NEVER read what is written on the slide to your audience.
7. Give your audience time to read each slide--when you show it, and before moving on.
8. Obey the time limit. If the warning sign is given that your time is almost up, move very quickly to your last slide--Conclusions--and use your last few moments to let the audience see them, as you explain. When the stop signal is given, end immediately.

QUESTION AND ANSWER PERIOD

Preparation:

1. Study.
2. Compose questions. Have your advisor and friends compose questions. Answer them (possibly first in Chinese, then in English).
3. Practice explaining all difficult and interesting aspects in English. What is most difficult to explain in English is probably what is most interesting to your audience.

Under fire:

1. Be sure you understand each question. It is a good habit to repeat the question to the audience. This ensures that you understand it correctly and that the entire audience hears it; it also gives you more time to compose the answer.
2. If you don't know the answer, say so.

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