

How to Do a Presentation

Jing Qian
New York University, Shanghai

January 21, 2026
BPEP-SHU 9042: The Political Economy of East Asia

Dos and Dont's of Presentation

(My very personal view)

Adapted from the workshop by Jonathan Mummolo (Princeton)

Caveats

Caveats

- These tips are based on what has/has not worked for *me*.

Caveats

- These tips are based on what has/has not worked for *me*.
- There is no one correct way to do a presentation.

Caveats

- These tips are based on what has/has not worked for *me*.
- There is no one correct way to do a presentation.
- BUT, I have reason for each recommendation. If you deviate, you should have a reason too.

Caveats

- These tips are based on what has/has not worked for *me*.
- There is no one correct way to do a presentation.
- BUT, I have reason for each recommendation. If you deviate, you should have a reason too.
- Most tips are for presenting research projects in political science. But I believe good presentations share some common features.

Caveats

- These tips are based on what has/has not worked for *me*.
- There is no one correct way to do a presentation.
- BUT, I have reason for each recommendation. If you deviate, you should have a reason too.
- Most tips are for presenting research projects in political science. But I believe good presentations share some common features.
- This is not a presentation itself, so I will not follow all the rules.

The First Question

The First Question

What consists a presentation? (generally)

The First Question

What consists a presentation? (generally)

- The slides (shown on a screen)
- The talking (by the presenter)

The First Question

What consists a presentation? (generally)

- The slides (shown on a screen)
- The talking (by the presenter)

Which is more important?

The First Question

What consists a presentation? (generally)

- The slides (shown on a screen)
- The talking (by the presenter)

Which is more important?

- What if you have to choose one from the two?

The Talking

Talking is Communication

Talking is Communication

- Why talking (live) at presentation?

Talking is Communication

- Why talking (live) at presentation?
- Communication

Talking is Communication

- Why talking (live) at presentation?
- Communication
- Pace, tempo, rhythm

Talking is Communication

- Why talking (live) at presentation?
- Communication
- Pace, tempo, rhythm
- *Interaction

Talking is Communication

- Why talking (live) at presentation?
- Communication
- Pace, tempo, rhythm
- *Interaction
- DON'T

Talking is Communication

- Why talking (live) at presentation?
- Communication
- Pace, tempo, rhythm
- *Interaction
- DON'T

Talking is Communication

- Why talking (live) at presentation?
- Communication
- Pace, tempo, rhythm
- *Interaction
- DON'T
 - Read from a script (paper note, your phone, laptop, etc.)

Talking is Communication

- Why talking (live) at presentation?
- Communication
- Pace, tempo, rhythm
- *Interaction
- DON'T
 - Read from a script (paper note, your phone, laptop, etc.)
 - Just as you won't like a teacher who reads from the textbook

Talking is Communication

- Why talking (live) at presentation?
- Communication
- Pace, tempo, rhythm
- *Interaction
- DON'T
 - Read from a script (paper note, your phone, laptop, etc.)
 - Just as you won't like a teacher who reads from the textbook
- DO

Talking is Communication

- Why talking (live) at presentation?
- Communication
- Pace, tempo, rhythm
- *Interaction
- DON'T
 - Read from a script (paper note, your phone, laptop, etc.)
 - Just as you won't like a teacher who reads from the textbook
- DO

Talking is Communication

- Why talking (live) at presentation?
- Communication
- Pace, tempo, rhythm
- *Interaction
- DON'T
 - Read from a script (paper note, your phone, laptop, etc.)
 - Just as you won't like a teacher who reads from the textbook
- DO
 - Practice, practice, practice

Talking is Communication

- Why talking (live) at presentation?
- Communication
- Pace, tempo, rhythm
- *Interaction
- DON'T
 - Read from a script (paper note, your phone, laptop, etc.)
 - Just as you won't like a teacher who reads from the textbook
- DO
 - Practice, practice, practice
 - The more important the talk, the more practices

Keep the Audience Engaged

Keep the Audience Engaged

- You want the audience to pay attention to your talk

Keep the Audience Engaged

- You want the audience to pay attention to your talk
- But the truth is they won't do that, at least not all the time

Keep the Audience Engaged

- You want the audience to pay attention to your talk
- But the truth is they won't do that, at least not all the time
- What to do?

Keep the Audience Engaged

- You want the audience to pay attention to your talk
- But the truth is they won't do that, at least not all the time
- What to do?
- There are many ways

Keep the Audience Engaged

- You want the audience to pay attention to your talk
- But the truth is they won't do that, at least not all the time
- What to do?
- There are many ways
- And one of them is....

Keep the Audience Engaged

- You want the audience to pay attention to your talk
- But the truth is they won't do that, at least not all the time
- What to do?
- There are many ways
- And one of them is....
- DRAMATIC PAUSE

Elements of Effective Slides

Presentation is About You Talking to the Audience

Presentation is About You Talking to the Audience

Slides are merely visual aids

Presentation is About You Talking to the Audience

Slides are merely visual aids

- Things that hard to describe verbally
 - Figures, tables, complex structure

Presentation is About You Talking to the Audience

Slides are merely visual aids

- Things that hard to describe verbally
 - Figures, tables, complex structure
- Things that too important to be only conveyed verbally
 - Key argument, crucial quotes, etc.

Don't Put the Cart Before the Horse

Don't Put the Cart Before the Horse

Don't include things in the slides if:

Don't Put the Cart Before the Horse

Don't include things in the slides if:

- You won't have time to go over

Don't Put the Cart Before the Horse

Don't include things in the slides if:

- You won't have time to go over
- You know the audience can't read

Don't Put the Cart Before the Horse

Don't include things in the slides if:

- You won't have time to go over
- You know the audience can't read
- *Anything that will distract the audience from your talk*

You know the audience can't read

You know the audience can't read

And you will probably say "(I'm sorry that) you probably cannot read this, but..."

You know the audience can't read

And you will probably say "(I'm sorry that) you probably cannot read this, but..."



Figures and Tables

Figures and Tables

- Only include ONE figure / table per slide

Figures and Tables

- Only include ONE figure / table per slide
 - Priority is that the audience can clearly read

Figures and Tables

- Only include ONE figure / table per slide
 - Priority is that the audience can clearly read
 - Multiple figures/tables usually distract and confuse people

Figures and Tables

- Only include ONE figure / table per slide
 - Priority is that the audience clearly read
 - Multiple figure/table usually distract and confuse people
- Unless absolutely necessary (e.g., for comparison)

Slides (Only) As Visual Aids

Slides (Only) As Visual Aids

- Audience needs to listen & read

Slides (Only) As Visual Aids

- Audience needs to listen & read
- Make sure they are consistent, not conflict

Slide Titles

Slide Titles

- Very valuable real estate.

Slide Titles

- Very valuable real estate.
- Chance to remind people of your argument, claims.

Slide Titles

- Very valuable real estate.
- Chance to remind people of your argument, claims.
- Avoid generic titles like “roadmap,” “results,” “implications.”

Slide Titles

- Very valuable real estate.
- Chance to remind people of your argument, claims.
- Avoid generic titles like “roadmap,” “results,” “implications.”
- Instead, say something substantive in the title.

Slides (Only) As Visual Aids

Slides (Only) As Visual Aids

- Advantage of a talk: get audience to focus on exactly what you want.

Slides (Only) As Visual Aids

- Advantage of a talk: get audience to focus on exactly what you want.
- They should hang on your every word.

Slides (Only) As Visual Aids

- Advantage of a talk: get audience to focus on exactly what you want.
- They should hang on your every word.
- As few words as possible on slides.

Slides (Only) As Visual Aids

- Advantage of a talk: get audience to focus on exactly what you want.
- They should hang on your every word.
- As few words as possible on slides.
- If a picture will suffice, use that.

Think Minimal

Think Minimal

- Words on the screen generally distract from the speaker's voice.

Think Minimal

- Words on the screen generally distract from the speaker's voice.
- But sometimes we need words to:

Think Minimal

- Words on the screen generally distract from the speaker's voice.
- But sometimes we need words to:
 - Guide

Think Minimal

- Words on the screen generally distract from the speaker's voice.
- But sometimes we need words to:
 - Guide
 - Re-inforce

Think Minimal

- Words on the screen generally distract from the speaker's voice.
- But sometimes we need words to:
 - Guide
 - Re-inforce
 - Structure

Think Minimal

- Words on the screen generally distract from the speaker's voice.
- But sometimes we need words to:
 - Guide
 - Re-inforce
 - Structure
 - Memorize

Think Minimal

- Words on the screen generally distract from the speaker's voice.
- But sometimes we need words to:
 - Guide
 - Re-inforce
 - Structure
 - Memorize
- Don't include texts on the slide for its own sake.

Think As the Audience

Think As the Audience

- Unveil one line of text at a time.

Think As the Audience

- If you don't.
- There will suddenly be an entire screen of new information.
- Consists of multiple bullet points.
- And the audience will try to read them first.
- Then they will not listen to what you say.
- And this is not we want.

Think As the Audience

Think As the Audience

- No walls of text.

Think As the Audience

- No walls of text.
- Unless absolutely necessary.

Think As the Audience

- No walls of text.
- Unless absolutely necessary.
- And you must read them out loud.

Walls of Text

Eleven years after it was abandoned, the so-called Indo-Pacific concept is back with a vengeance in regional security debates. At the 2017 Shangri-la Dialogue, there were only five mentions of the ‘Indo-Pacific’ at the annual defence ministerial forum. In the following year, the figure had jumped to 92. The Indo-Pacific Four countries promoting the ‘free and open Indo-Pacific’ (FOIP) concept share many principles, including freedom of navigation and overflight, connectivity and economic growth, and respect for the rule of law.

Introduction

The Mindset

Be Honest

Be Honest

- Your project won't be perfect

Be Honest

- Your project won't be perfect
- There will be shortcomings

Be Honest

- Your project won't be perfect
- There will be shortcomings
 - Do not try to hide them

Be Honest

- Your project won't be perfect
- There will be shortcomings
 - Do not try to hide them
 - Instead, frame the shortcomings

Be Honest

- Your project won't be perfect
- There will be shortcomings
 - Do not try to hide them
 - Instead, frame the shortcomings
- Show you have thought deeply about them

Be Honest

- Your project won't be perfect
- There will be shortcomings
 - Do not try to hide them
 - Instead, frame the shortcomings
- Show you have thought deeply about them
- Discuss how you could do better, and why you haven't

Be Honest

- Your project won't be perfect
- There will be shortcomings
 - Do not try to hide them
 - Instead, frame the shortcomings
- Show you have thought deeply about them
- Discuss how you could do better, and why you haven't
 - Not feasible/possible to do so.

Be Honest

- Your project won't be perfect
- There will be shortcomings
 - Do not try to hide them
 - Instead, frame the shortcomings
- Show you have thought deeply about them
- Discuss how you could do better, and why you haven't
 - Not feasible/possible to do so.
 - Constraints on time, resources, etc.

Be Confident

Be Confident

Do not preemptively apologize.

Be Confident

Do not preemptively apologize.

- Apologies are fine if you make a mistake.

Be Confident

Do not preemptively apologize.

- Apologies are fine if you make a mistake.
- *Preemptive apologies are not fine.*

Be Confident

Do not preemptively apologize.

- Apologies are fine if you make a mistake.
- *Preemptive apologies are not fine.*
- Nervous speakers often open their talk with some form of apology.

Be Confident

Do not preemptively apologize.

- Apologies are fine if you make a mistake.
- *Preemptive apologies are not fine.*
- Nervous speakers often open their talk with some form of apology.
- If you don't believe your work is good, why should the audience?

Be Confident

Do not preemptively apologize.

- Apologies are fine if you make a mistake.
- *Preemptive apologies are not fine.*
- Nervous speakers often open their talk with some form of apology.
- If you don't believe your work is good, why should the audience?
- Why do you intentionally waste audience's time?

A lesson from Conan

Lesson: Avoid Self Sabotage

Lesson: Avoid Self Sabotage

- Canon describing sabotage by a guest, but presenters do this to themselves!

Lesson: Avoid Self Sabotage

- Canon describing sabotage by a guest, but presenters do this to themselves!
- You want the audience to believe you are great.

Lesson: Avoid Self Sabotage

- Canon describing sabotage by a guest, but presenters do this to themselves!
- You want the audience to believe you are great.
- Project excellence, not insecurity.

Lesson: Avoid Self Sabotage

- Canon describing sabotage by a guest, but presenters do this to themselves!
- You want the audience to believe you are great.
- Project excellence, not insecurity.
- Be confident, not arrogant.