

A Rough Guide to Making Great Presentations

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Objective: Express what you have accomplished. There may be other objectives.

Slides (for a job talk):

1. Title – title, your name, your affiliation
 - a. Acknowledge co-authors but NOT on slide
 - b. You may not need to state title
2. Question – Should be a question – use ?
3. Outline – use same headings on slides
4. Motivation – Why is this an important question? Why do we care?
 - a. Is it controversial?
 - b. Are people hurt, helped?
 - c. Is it puzzling?
 - d. Is it big or common?
 - e. How does this contribute to the literature?
5. Preview of results
6. Related literature – Not a literature review
 - a. Group literature into areas
 - b. Include authors, but don't say them all – only mention the most important
 - c. Build a case for your work – there is something important left undone in the literature
7. Theoretical model
8. Data
 - a. Summary statistics
 - b. Point out interesting variables
9. Empirical model
 - a. Equations – but not too many
 - b. NEVER use computer code speak
10. Results
 - a. Tables and graphs are great
 - b. Make tables and graphs self explanatory – titles, definitions
 - c. Make table fonts and graphs really large, cut back on amount of content
11. Policy implications or relate back to motivation
12. Conclusions
 - a. Related directly back to question
 - b. 2-3 points
13. Future research
14. Additional slides – not in presentation- extra equations or results

Hints for slides:

1. Keep it simple –
 - a. not too much information on a slide
 - b. Generally, slides and talk have less info than paper
 - c. Stick to key points

2. Remember your slides/visuals should complement your oral delivery not substitute for it
 - a. Use to help follow organize the talk
 - b. Reinforce key points
 - c. Use to present things that are clearer with an illustration, table, or graph
 - d. Don't use your everything tables, make specific tables for visuals that highlight key findings that your are prepared to explain
3. Get details right
 - a. No spelling or notation errors
 - b. Be consistent with titles, numbering – be organized
 - c. If use transparencies, put in a binder
4. Bring more than one copy/disk with slides

Hints for presentations:

1. Practice
2. Arrive early, set up so you don't seem rushed
3. Speak slowly and clearly – take a few deep breaths.
4. Introduce yourself, and thank the attendees for inviting you and coming to your presentation
5. Never, ever read from your notes, PowerPoint or transparency; this is the one hard rule
6. Don't get lost in the details. Stick to the flow of the main points. Visuals should help you do this by keeping to the key points
7. Interact with audience
 - a. Think of your talk as a conversation, not a “delivery”
 - b. Face your audience, look at audience – make eye contact, find at least one person you can look directly at
 - c. When you look at the big screen to connect to a point, return to your audience
 - d. Scan entire room for questions often – don't only concentrate on those that react to you
 - e. Move around room – don't stand in one place
 - f. Ok to be appropriately personable
8. Make sure your presentation is audience appropriate
 - a. Don't use slang
 - b. Avoid filler words like mmmh
 - c. Set formality level appropriate to circumstances
 - d. Set technical level appropriate to circumstances
9. Use appropriate body language
 - a. Don't cross arms,
 - b. Don't back away from questions
 - c. Move around a bit, but don't “fidget”
10. Make sure your presentation lasts the correct amount of time
11. Be confident – you really do know more than anyone about your topic
12. End with a thank you
13. Practice

How to handle questions

Questions can be scary, and they can make or break your presentation. Try to remain confident. You really know more than anyone about your work.

Sometimes you will be given a choice of taking questions during the talk or waiting until after you have finished. I suggest you agree to take questions as they come. This makes you seem more confident and questions will get asked throughout the talk anyway. You might as well agree to it.

Often, questions are asked to see how you react. The specifics of your answer may matter much less than if you appear interested, confident, and respond appropriately.

Always be sure you understand the question before you start to answer it. It is good to ask a clarifying question to be sure you have understood.

Address the question as clearly and concisely as you can.

Always remain professional. Never express that you think a question is stupid. You can comment on a question by saying it is interesting or good, but never that it is irrelevant.

If a question asks something you directly cover later in the talk you can defer the question. I suggest you tell the person you will cover that soon, and ask the person to re-ask the question if they are not satisfied when you discuss the relevant material.

You should control the pace of questions. If you answer a question and remain silent you are begging for more questions. You should never seem like you are rushing answers, but you should control the pace.

You can interact with the question asker. It often works well to take a step towards the person so they feel you are engaging with them. However, don't exclude the rest of the audience. Although you should engage with the question asker, don't let them control the pace. You should address the question, but you don't need to verify that they are satisfied with your answer. Don't rush, but don't let them control your pace.

If you do not know the direct answer to a question, say what you know that is directly related. You can say something like "I see that you are questioning whether..., and I'm not sure." If you really have nothing to say you might try, "That is an interesting question. I don't know how that applies here. I will think about it." Don't let this scare you. You shouldn't plan to use this approach too often during your presentation, but you should always be honest. The question asker may just want to see how you react. Remain confident, and move on. Never guess. This will only get you in trouble.

If a question asker continues to ask the same question and you think you have answered it already, verify that you understand the question and try again. If someone gets stuck on the same point and you don't have any more to say about the point and you have spent several minutes trying to address the question, I suggest you say "I can't seem to get to your point, why don't we discuss it after the seminar?"

During questions or after the talk you may end up agreeing to send someone a response or additional information. This is fine, but you must then send the response. Never commit to something and then not deliver.