

DocTUM: How to give a great scientific talk

Oral Presentation Guidelines

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General points about 'giving a great talk'

Oral presentations at a seminar or conference are for sharing your research work with other scientists. Oral presentations must emphasize both the *motivation* for the work and the *outcome* of it, and they must present just enough evidence to establish the validity of this outcome. Your talk must **convince the audience** that the research you present is important, valid, and relevant to them. Like scientific papers - they must aim to inform, not impress.

- **Visualize:** Use appropriate visual aids (i.e. PowerPoint), and make best use of them.
 - **Don't overload** slides!
 - Make sure each slide has only one message, and the text is written in large enough font to be easily visible.
 - Make your slides interesting; don't just read out a list of bullet points from each slide. Judicious **use of photos/graphics** can be very helpful. But not too interesting; using too many different colours, fonts and graphics will distract your audience.
 - Your audience will sit through very many presentations during the conference – make sure they remember what yours was about!

1. 'Think like your audience'

Identify your audience: are they expert researchers in your field? Undergraduates? Non-scientists? When speaking to experts, you should focus less on background and more on data. When presenting to non-scientists, speak more broadly about your interests without boring anyone with highly detailed data. Tailor your talk to your audience.

2. Choosing Content

Oral presentations impose both the sequence and the rhythm of content on their audience. They are therefore harder to follow and should be much more selective in what they contain. The idea is not to say out loud everything you would write in your dissertation or in a paper, but to select the content wisely.

Clarify from the start what you'll cover: if the audience remembers one or two points from your presentation, what should they be? The very best presentations are **focused, effectively paced, and on time!** To achieve this, carefully refine your presentation's story arc. Maintaining this focus will empower your audience, and will potentially reinforce your main point.

For structuring the content of your talk you can hold on to the following bullet points:

- **What is the question you're interested in?**
- **How have you investigated at this question?**
- **What have you found?**
- **What conclusions can you draw?**



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3. Layout & Structure

Oral presentations are for **convincing with both verbal and visual content**. Therefore, you need to structure the visual content to be informative, easily understandable and matching with the verbal presentation of your data.

Don't try and pack too much into the presentation! Try and get a few simple messages across and avoid too much detail.

- Show no more than 1 slide per minute of speaking time. This means approximately 10-12 slides MAXIMUM for a 12 minutes presentation at the symposium.
- We recommend a presentation format of 16:9, 4:3 is also acceptable
- Repeat your main messages more than once

Hypothesis slides are a must. For methods and timelines, visuals can help clarify. Simplify results by presenting only the most important data points. Distill your paper's bar graph into the important bits — don't just copy-and-paste. To emphasise, consider animating data points to guide the eye.

4. Written Text

- Make the letters on your slides **BIG ENOUGH**. Suggested minimum font is 14.
- Avoid lengthy and complicated formulations / text boxes, the audience will not be able to follow.
- Think about pathways or flow charts. If you do have slides with words: enlarge the font and aim to limit each sentence to one line. You should be describing information verbally in enough detail that words on your slide are more-or-less unnecessary.

5. Graphs & Images

- Use images (and a few words when you need them).
- Keep graphs and tables simple, and make sure they are legible and appropriately labelled

6. Guiding through the Presentation

- **Try not to read from a text.**
But if you must, make sure the text is written in spoken English (which is different, and less formal, than written English)
- **Time your presentation** so that it does not overrun. This is very important!
- **Practice your talk** beforehand to make sure you've got the timing right.
- **Time for questions** Allow at least 5 minutes at the end of your presentation for questions (if time for questions is not already planned in).
- **Questions and discussion:** This is an opportunity for you to benefit from the audiences' wisdom, as well as the audience to benefit from yours. To maximise the opportunities for discussion, repeat the asked question for the audience and keep your answers succinct.

7. Appropriate Preparation

- **Upload your presentations in time;** that means at the time defined by the organizers, or - in case there are no specifications - latest in the break before your session starts.
- **Verify your presentation for compatibility and proper** operation If necessary, especially if you have embedded multi-media content, you will have the final opportunity to adjust or tweak your presentation at that time.
- **Backup** If possible, bring own computer and a USB thumb drive with presentation materials as backup.

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8. Tips & Tricks for a successful Presentation

— Simplicity and legibility are keys to effective oral presentations —

- **Present** an introduction and a summary or conclusion.
- **Include** only information or data that can be properly explained in the allotted time.
- **Your audience needs time** to interpret the data that you present. While you are very familiar with the data displayed, the audience is not. Describe the purpose, units and the legend for each graph.
- **When you display a graph**, tell the audience what they should be looking for in order to grasp the point you are trying to make. The audience will not have time to figure it out for themselves.
- **Use repetition in your talk** to ensure the facts are understood by the audience.
- **Repeat** any questions that are posed to you.
- **If a question requires a lengthy reply**, suggest that you and the person asking the question meet after the presentation. Then take the discussion out of the meeting room.
- **Use your laser pointer effectively**. If using a laser pointer, do not overuse it to the [point of distraction](#). If you're pointing at a slide, you're not looking at and engaging your audience.
- **Eyes up!** Looking constantly down, at the computer, or at the projector screen are presentation killers. The presenter must look up and engage the audience while presenting. Ideally, look at people at the back of the room – or at the back of the room itself.
- **When nervous**, it is tempting to make excuses or act negatively. If you begin with an unconstructive statement, people will immediately view you with a critical eye. Instead, stay upbeat and project confidence.

Summary

- **Be yourself:** people relate to and connect with authenticity.
- **Prepare, practice and perfect:** get rid of those crutch words, like 'um' and 'you know'.
- **Describe what you're telling us:** use vivid words to help the audience paint a picture.
- **Speak slowly and modulate your voice:** change up your tone, volume and pitch to keep the audience engaged.
- **Study the greats:** watch what really great speakers do.
- **Get feedback:** a practice audience can help you get the bugs out.
- **Appearance:** if you look good, you'll feel good, which will help you give a great speech.
- **Pauses:** they give the audience time to think, and help them engage.
- **Body language:** use gestures and make use of the space to help deliver your message.
- **Be confident:** use your face, body language and stance to own the stage.
- The star of the presentation is not your slides – it is YOU

