

Things to keep in mind for a talk

PRACTICE!

The amount you have to practice is not proportional to the length of the talk. For a good 10-minute talk you will have to practice harder than for a one-hour talk. Give a practice talk to your colleagues. The more talks you give, the better you get! And no, the nervousness never will go away, but you can learn how to deal with it.

Every audience has a very limited attention span. Do not expect every member of the audience to be attentive all the time. Make it possible for somebody who has had their own thoughts to come back to your talk and understand what you are talking about. For this, a very clear structure, including cartoons and maybe text slides, are essential. Make your visual aids easy to read. If you are doing a computer-based presentation, make sure you are mastering the technology!

Every talk consists of 4 main sections:

1. **Introduction** Tell the audience what you are going to tell them!
 - ✓ Thank your host.
 - ✓ Pose the question.
 - ✓ Say why it is important.
 - ✓ Give the punch line.

2. **Main part of talk** Tell the audience what want to tell them!
 - Pose the question.
 - Set out with necessary background information, to make the audience understand why it is important. But never lose contact with your very own subject.
 - Name other people in the field and make clear how they contributed to the understanding of the area.
 - Say how you addressed the question and explain the methods. Usually you should keep explanation of methods to a minimum.

- Divide the talk into sections if necessary. After each section, summarize your conclusions, preferably with a slide (cartoon or simple text). Make clear how your results are answering the question.
- Summarize your sections and draw the conclusions.

3. Conclusion Tell the audience what you just told them!

- Pose the question and give the answer.
- Give credit where credit is due.

4. Questions

- Allow enough time for questions.
- Be prepared for questions. Have answers ready.
- Repeat the question after listening to it. This gives you time to prepare your answer and gives feedback on how you understood the question.
- Never deride a question.
- Be open to alternative interpretation of your work, especially if you know that your conclusions are not all that firm. Openness gives a better impression than narrow-mindedness.
- Do not get stuck on a question. If things are not clarified, say that you will talk about this with the questioner afterwards.

Visual Aids

- ❖ Make visual aids that are self-consistent.
- ❖ Slides should be easily readable from the back of the room.
- ❖ A slide is different from a publication figure. Usually, the text has to be larger and the lines thicker. If possible, the slide has to be much simpler. Avoid reducing the number of slides and then cramming all the information into one slide.
- ❖ Avoid outlandish color schemes! Remember that colors on the computer screen look different than on the finished slide. Some colors are hard to see. Keep in mind that many members of the audience are color blind.
- ❖ Titles can help to guide the audience.

How to start?

A) Layout, content and audiovisual support:

1. Identify the 1-3 critical points that you want the audience to understand.
2. Choose data that you are showing on the basis that they should support your points. Illustrate and support your points and save caveats for later or even the question period.
3. Simpler is better. The purpose of the talk and audiovisual aids is to support your hypothesis and not to impress the audience by how hard working you are.
4. Do not complicate the story! Before you include any information, ask whether it is relevant for your critical points.

B) Delivery:

1. Identify the punch line, learn the conclusions by heart. Don't end with 'eh, well, ehm, that's it.....'!
2. Work on the introduction after you are happy with the critical points. Unless you know what the critical points are, you do not know what to introduce! Learn the first few minutes of your talk by heart. For a 10 minute Neuroscience talk, this means learn the whole thing by heart!
3. For every slide know why you are showing it. Tell the audience first what is on the slide and what it means, i.e. introduce the slide. Then make your additional points and work on the transition to the next slide.
4. Do not say: "this slide only/just shows". If the slide does not make an important point, leave it out!
5. Do not apologize for the quality of your data or slides. If unavoidable, redirect the audience to the good parts of the slide.
6. Practice.