Presentation Advice

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Most of this Advice Applies To:

- **Formal presentations**
- Papers
- Lectures
- Elevator pitches
- Informal presentations
- Blog posts
- Memos
- Websites

Five Steps to Success

1. Read Fatahalian's "Tips for Giving Clear Talks"
   http://www.cs.cmu.edu/~kayvonf/misc/cleartalktips.pdf

2. Read these slides

3. Read Littman's "Stylistic Comments"
   http://cs.brown.edu/~mlittman/etc/style.html

4. Practice a lot

5. Improve **one** element each time you rehearse or edit

This is a Work In Progress

I'm posting this rough version of these notes now because something is better than nothing in this case.

This is in slide form so that I can integrate it with Kayvon's notes in the future after I've polished it.

SLIDES

Slide Deck Roles

- Support your presentation to a live audience

- Posted online for standalone reading

- Source for slides for other presentations by
  - You
  - Your manager or advisor
  - Collaborators
  - Colleagues

You will frequently have to (quickly) make one deck to serve all roles.

Use PowerPoint

- Everyone has it:
    - Sharing slides is easy
    - Easy to borrow a laptop when yours breaks at the conference

- One tool for presenting and editing

- Admittedly not the best editing tool for all content

Avoid Complex Builds & Transitions

- They distract

- They make it hard to change slides quickly in response to questions

- They don't appear in the PDF that many people will see

- They hurt re-use of slides in other contexts

Use Simple Templates

They:
- Emphasizes your content
- Likely easiest to read
- Print well in black and white
- Easier to reuse
- Work with different Powerpoint versions

Include Extra Content

- (past the end of your presentation)
- Helps with questions

- Include key figures from your paper
- Include failure cases
- Push obscure cases out of main presentation

Use "Presenter" Notes for Readers

- Consider the audience who isn't hearing you because they're looking at the slides offline.

- I usually put bullets and explanations in the notes section for people who are reading the slides later.

- I don't look at the "presenter" notes or use written aids when speaking

- I do often write out a talk (approximately) by hand as a way of getting the flow straight in my head and refining key language.

Engage the Audience

- **WHAT**: Tease the audience early on with a good result--let them know why they should to listen

- **WHY**: Spend a lot of time defining the problem carefully, especially hidden assumptions. Otherwise they'll wonder the entire time why

- Create a narrative
  – Define the "characters"
  – Express the "conflict"
  – Tell a story
  – Make a satisfying resolution
  – Inspire the future

Pacing

- Evaluate how much time each section is worth, and then edit it down to that size

- Budget about one minute per slide

- Use section titles and blank slides to break up thoughts and re-engage the audience

COMPOSITION

Color

- Choose only one accent color

- Use mostly neutral colors

- If you have a lot of colors, use pastels

- Always distinguish by brightness, not hue
  - Colorblind viewers
  - Poor saturation on printers
  - Printed slides and handouts

- Read about "color theory" if you must get fancy

Fonts

- Dense text should be in **serif** fonts
  - Serifs help the eye follow text
  - Use **proportional** width fonts with **kerning**

- Very small text should be in **sans serif** fonts
  - At low resolution, serifs are hard to distinguish.
  - That's why 1980's computers used them

- Titles may be either

Fonts

- Mathematics should be in serif fonts

- Code should usually be in `fixed width` fonts

- Prefer "common" fonts
  - Likely to work on different computers
  - Examples: **Times**, **Helvetica**, Tahoma, Lucida Grande, Verdana, Impact, Arial, Arial Black, Courier (for code)

Styles

- Use bold and italics sparingly

- Avoid underlining, outlining, and shadows

HOW TO MOVE AND TALK

- Describe every image/graph as if the audience can't see it

- Realise that people considering your points or taking notes will miss about 50% of the content

Stimulate the Audience

- Vary your pitch and volume between major points

- Audience participation soon in a long talk
  - "Guess which of these is a real photograph"
  - "Raise your hand if you know linear algebra"
  - "Write down a random number"
  - Pass around props

Move Like an Actor

- Keep your hands above your waist

- Keep significant space at your back

- Only make distinct, strong motions:
  - Pointing
  - Walking to a specific location
  - Don't pace or sway

When Over Time…

- If the previous speaker already addressed some background material well, then skip over yours or move through it more briefly.

- Plan to end a bit early. No-one will object.

- Skip points, slides, or sections instead of talking faster

- I intentionally create technical slides that I intend to almost always skip over
  - The audience is relieved when a minor detail was skipped to get to the "good" part
  - Good for answering questions later
  - Supports an unexpectedly sophisticated audience

- If the previous speaker already addressed some background material well, skip over yours or move through it more briefly

Don't Apologize or Blame

- If you misspeak, then restate or just **move on**

- If something looks bad…
  - Slides are low contrast
  - Projector is blurry or image is small
  - Videos don't play
  - Images are too dark

  …that's your fault for not testing. **Move on**.

- If you forget what you were going to say, then just **move on**.

INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

You Care About Your Audience

- You want them to like and respect you

- You don't want to accidentally upset, offend, or threaten

But many speakers inadvertently do this through ignorance!

The next five slides tell you about common language that is upsetting, offensive, or threatening to some people.

You don't have to agree or understand. Just follow the advice.

Avoid Popular-but-Offensive Phrases

- Say "**reveal**" instead of
  - "Open the kimono," "Lift the dress," and "Show some ankle"

- Say "**accessible**" instead of
  - "Even my grandmother could use it"

- Say "**too many cooks**" instead of
  - "Too many chiefs, not enough indians"

- Say "**believe**" or "**conform**" instead of
  - "Drink the kool-aid"

Avoid Popular-but-Offensive Terms

- Say "**better**" or "**good**" instead of:
  - Whips, kills, owns, rapes

- Say "**worse**" or "**bad**" instead of:
  - Blows, sucks, gay(!), retarded, sissy

- Say "**silly**" or "**erratic**" instead of:
  - Psychotic, crazy, schitzophrenic

Don't refer to "women" as "girls"

If you're really talking about young children, "boy" and "girl" are appropriate…

…but does your work really support a *gender* distinction? What about other genders?

- Beware of assumptions about sex, gender, and sexuality. E.g., if you personify roles in your talk, avoid making everything/everyone male, or assuming male-female partners. Be really careful about who "wins" and "loses" in gendered examples. Concrete examples are often helpful, but it is best to tread lightly here.

Be a Little Boring

- Avoid humor and informality until you're very experienced
  - Even then, missteps are the price of being lively

- It is better to sound overly formal than to confuse or offend your audience
  - You're there to explain your work, not be a commedian or pop music star

Be Pedantic

- Define all technical terms. Especially acronyms.
- Avoid jargon
  - Spend your time on concepts, not notation

- Beware that the language that you're speaking is not the native language for many people in the room

- Rhetorical flourishes, speaking quickly, and informality of may be really confusing

- Your accent might be hard to understand
  - Even if *you* are a native speaker…*they* might not be native listeners

- Beware that cultural references are often confusing: someone five years older or younger than you or who grew up in a different location may not have even heard of the TV shows, music, etc. that you like. Do you really want to spend five minutes explaining the setup of a specific TV show to make an analogy for a process, or would you rather talk about your work?