Effective Technical Presentations

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What is the Message?

• For this talk, tools, tips and techniques towards making a presentation that is

  – Well received. If people don’t like it they may miss the importance of the message

  – Well understood. You want people to walk away with a concept, idea, algorithm, theorem, etc. that they followed well enough to restate
What is the Right way?

• There are different approaches that best fit you.

• Know your audience (as well as you can).

• Always cover your summary.
  – A well known speaker starts with the conclusions and shows how to get them.
Some Universal Rules (Ding):

• Always finish within your allotted time!

• If you are talking about a paper, the goal is to have people read the paper.
  – Tell a good story

• Consider color on your slides
  – Bells and whistles? Maybe just a bell or whistle.
Some Universal Rules

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Preparation

• Practice the presentation
  – Out loud
  – With an audience if you can

• Try to take a look at the room

• Have a plan for equipment failure

• No live Demos (EVER)
Some Basics

• Stand outside the viewing lines of the audience (so they can see).

• Speak loudly and/or use a microphone (so they can hear).

• Be ready to start on time.
Always Add Value to Your Slide

• If you read the slide it will bore the audience as they can read it too.

• You cannot be spontaneous with a strict script (though the spontaneity should be practiced).

• Complex equations are best explained rather than read. People can read in depth later.
Get your audience involved
(if you can)

• What font is easiest on the eye should be considered.
• What layout might be best for this talk?
• Does this slide look better in black and white or color?
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    (if you can)

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• What layout might be best for this talk?

• Does this slide look better in black and white or color?
  – Please vote for Black and White by raising your hands
Make a simple presentation

• Provide an outline of the ideas

• Provide some details/important content
  – Excite people to go find the rest of the details

• Reinforce the message with the Summary
In the beginning...

• Cover basics. Sure people might know them or of them, but what of the few newbies or interlopers

• It is great if someone thinks “I could have done this” (they didn’t), but they must have understood you
Keep slides from being busy

• Just a few bullets per slide is O.K.
  – Lots of text can be unreadable

• Good: more slides each with less text

• Should you show just one bullet at a time?
  – Yes and sometimes.
Size the font

• Small room -> smaller font

• Big room -> bigger font

• Keynote -> really big font and keep the information “high on the slide” for those in back.
Speaking

• Speak loudly and clearly
  – You’re in charge so keep it moving without silences

• If you need a microphone, be sure it is working

• Remember, if you are moving people look at you and not the slide (exploit if you want)

• If you have equations, explain them
Speaking

• Look at your audience

• Speak slowly so you can be understood

• Always try to improve your speaking style, remove uh, um, etc.
What is the Takeaway?

• Try to leave the audience with at least one piece of useful information

• Some people will like one thing and others will have a different perspective

• Example: A keynote speaker several years ago said the last several prediction contests (Netflix $1M US prize included) had been won by classifier ensembles
Sell your idea(s)

• Let your excitement show.

• A good talk will leave you expecting more than you get from a paper, for example.

• Help people see the idea is easy to build upon and utilize (if it is).
Good Illustrations - Helpful

- A picture is worth a thousand words.
  - Gold prices are sharply up since 2000.
Practice

• Good presenters have practiced multiple times.

• Sometimes you see a great presenter going over slides just before a presentation.
  – Just small upgrades/changes

• Give talk to friends, mirror, record and/or listen to it.
  – Recite silently (n times)…
Talk is ready, but too long?

• My students often give me, say, 36 slides for a 12 minute talk.

• Then they cut it to 33, because it can’t be shorter.

• Try 12-15 and put the rest away for questions.
  – Let me know if they get used.
Summary

• Be prepared. Practice.

• Stay within your time

• Know the audience

• Have some slides for expected questions
Questions
Prepare for Questions

• Have a slide or two prepared for likely questions.

• Have a slide or two for more details, if you feel uneasy about leaving some details out.
Handling Questions

• Decide, beforehand, if you will take questions during the talk (I like to)

• When should you leave time for questions?
  – Always!

• How much time? At least a couple of minutes
  – So always finish a little early
Practice How?

• Give the presentation to colleagues or family.

• Talk to the mirror.

• Listen to the slides (make them PDF and have the computer speak them).

• What else?
  – Silently recite the presentation.
Controversies

• Color or no color. Need contrast surely. Some are color blind.

• Outline of slides or not?
  – Maybe for each section. Maybe not. In the beginning some will have no idea what it means

• Questions during talk or not?
Other Ideas

• Try videotaping a practice presentation

• Have slides build on one another where feasible

• If a picture is worth 1k words, use figures