

# **Guidelines and Suggestions for Making a Good Presentation**

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Giving a formal presentation or talk is not easy. Below, you will find two sets of helpful guidelines and suggestions, one for preparing your viewgraph slides and one for the actual talk.

## **1 Preparing the Presentation Slides**

1. Decide on an attractive template for the viewgraph slides. Sans serif fonts, a few but strong colors, running headers and footers are commonly used on professional presentations.
2. Start with a “title” slide (to introduce yourself and your talk), followed by a “contents” (or “organization”) slide to give an outline of your talk.
3. Take advantage of the available itemization features and fonts sizes to distinguish levels of text in your slides. Normally,

First-level text begins with an upper-case letter

- second-level text begins with a bullet, starts with a lowercase letter and not punctuated (if it wraps, it should align under the text not the bullet)
    - third-level text indents further to the right, begins with a symbol such as a hyphen, and begins with a lower case. Three levels of text is normally sufficient.
4. Enumerate (instead of using bullets or hyphens) when you have a good reason to (e.g., to emphasize the order or refer to the items by their number). When you enumerate, it is best to use Arabic numerals.

5. Make all itemized (or enumerated) items parallel, i.e., begin them with the same part of speech (e.g., noun, or verb) and make them same type of items (e.g., a phrase or a complete sentence).
6. Maintain consistency among the font types, styles, and sizes used in the slides. Use color and other word-processor features properly to enhance your slides; be aware that un-coordinated uses of these features can cause a distraction.
7. Limit the amount of information that appears on one slide; only put the items that you would like the audience to read. Showing a slide for a fraction of second is not very helpful.
8. Slides should not repeat what you have to say; they should supplement your presentation.

## **2 Giving the Presentation**

1. **The presentation should be well-organized: it must have an introduction, a main body, and conclusion(s). The organization should be made clear to the audience.**

Tell your audience what you are going to tell them, then tell them, then tell them what you told them. Your first slide should have your name and the title of your talk. The very next slide should be an outline of your talk. Then you can have the slides for the rest of your talk, but let the audience know where you are in the talk at each main point. You can do this by putting up the outline slide again and/or by saying something like "Going on to point number three..." The last slide before your conclusion should contain a summary of your main points. You might be able to use your outline slide again here.

2. **The presentation must be focused and the topic should be covered adequately in the time allotted. The answers afterwards, if any, should be brief and relevant to the topic; you must be willing to say, "I don't know."**

Do not make your talk so broad that you can cover only the simplest concepts in 20 minutes. Carefully practice your talk so that you know that you can cover the topic in the time allotted. You are not expected to know everything about your topic, so do not be embarrassed to say, "I don't know." This is better than trying to fake an answer.

3. **The talk must be presented at a level understandable to the audience; it should be neither too complicated nor too simple.**

Know your audience. Remember that you are talking to a specific group of people with specific background. This group at the university may mostly be composed of EECS (graduate) students and faculty. You can expect your audience to know a lot about different parts of computing sciences, but maybe not a lot about your particular topic. Do not talk at such a shallow level that your audience will already know almost everything you are saying. Also, do not give a talk that assumes a level of knowledge of the subject that most of your audience does not have.

4. **You should be well-prepared and organized; you must rehearse your talk before presenting it to the audience.**

Using overheads or a computerized presentation is good evidence that you have prepared and organized your talk. Practice giving your talk to another person once or twice; have them time you and signal you when your time is running short.

5. **You should present yourself well. Dress properly, be relaxed, cheerful, and enthusiastic.**

It turns out that people are more willing to listen to and accept a speaker's message when they perceive the speaker as a professional. To show your audience that you are a professional, dress like a conventional member of your profession. For men in Computer Science, this typically means pressed slacks, shined shoes, pressed dress shirt, and tie. A suit or sports coat is not always required, but is certainly acceptable. For women in Computer Science, appropriate dress generally means a conservative skirt and blouse (with or without jacket) or a conservative dress, with little or no jewelry.

Convey a cheerful and enthusiastic attitude. If you act bored with your material, the audience will be bored also. If you are excited about your topic, the audience is likely to become more interested. If you are relaxed and at ease with your topic, the audience will think that you have a thorough understanding of it, and will be more willing to accept what you have to say.

6. **You should have good audience rapport; face the audience, have good eye contact, and be alert and receptive to feedback from the audience.**

Your assignment is not to give a speech to an audience but to talk to individual people about a topic that is of interest to you and that you know more about than they do. Look at and talk to individual people in the audience. Do not talk to or look at the projector, the screen, your notes, the floor, the back wall, etc. Your talk is greatly improved if the audience recognize that you are talking to them rather than talking at them. Look at and talk to one person, then another, then another, and so on. Move around a bit to make sure that you talk to people in different parts of the room. Pay attention to audience feedback. A hand cupped behind the ear means, "Speak up!" A head resting on the table means, "This talk is boring." Someone scratching their head in puzzlement may mean that they are not understanding you very well. Adjust what you are saying and how you are saying it to adapt to this feedback.

**7. You should speak loudly and clearly.**

If the audience can't hear you, they won't be able to get anything out of your talk. You may have to speak more loudly than you normally do in order to be heard. Ask a friend in the class to signal you if you aren't talking loudly enough.

**8. Control your voice.**

Avoid speaking in a monotone; avoid hype; avoid information-free utterances ("um"). Project energy and vitality without being hyperactive and too excited.

Vary your tone of voice to emphasize your points. If you talk in a monotone, your audience will quickly become bored. Avoid mumbling; enunciate your words clearly and distinctly. If you are a non-native speaker of English, try to make sure you are pronouncing the words properly.

**9. You should maintain an even speaking pace, without rushing or dragging.**

A pace that is too slow bores the audience and puts them to sleep. A pace that is too fast confuses the audience. Be especially careful not to start off too slowly, which will force you to rush at the end. Don't memorize your talk; if you do, you will have a tendency to rush through it.

10. **Audio/visual aids (electronic media, slides, transparencies, illustrations, demonstrations, etc.) should be used effectively.**

PowerPoint-like viewgraphs and AV aids should enhance your talk, not distract people from it. Your audience will tend to look at the screen (the brightest thing in the room) even when it is blank. So avoid having a blank screen for more than a second or two. The audience will also read everything on each slide, so avoid putting more than one main point (in just a few words) on each slide. Make the print large enough so that everyone can easily read it. Do not put everything that you plan to say on your slides, and do not read your slides to your audience.

Color can be useful in emphasizing points or illustrating the organization of your talk. But indiscriminate use of color is distracting. Avoid busy backgrounds and cluttered slides with too much stuff on them.

Prepare the room for your talk beforehand: close the blinds, turn off the lights, adjust the screen, etc. Arrive early enough to check out the projector, adjust the focus, and position the projector correctly.

11. **The presentation should end with a list of credits (references or bibliography items).**

Your talk should end with the bibliography and a call for questions. List only your three or four best (or most accessible) references. Use a large font. (Including a slide with a list of references is not generally done at conferences because your paper, which is published in the conference proceedings, will include a list of references.)

12. **You should complete the presentation within the allowed time (normally 20–25 minutes), leaving a few minutes for questions.**

The talk itself should take 20-25 minutes, leaving a few minutes afterwards for questions, plus a few minutes for the next speaker to come up to the front of the room. If your talk is under 15 minutes, then you have not made adequate use of the time available. If your talk goes on for more than 25 minutes, you risk being cut off in mid-sentence by the talk moderator. It may be considered rude to overrun time, and may compress others' talk, or make everyone late.

**Acknowledgements.** The second set of guidelines for preparing for the talk are adapted from "Suggestions for Improvement of Presentations" for Computer Science CS8021, Mississippi State University.