

Tips on “*How to give a good seminar talk.*”

(Ref: S.L.P. Jones, J. Hughes, J. Launchbury, *How give a good research talk*, ACM SIGPLAN Notices, Vol. 28, No. 11, November 1993, p. 9 – 12.)

A seminar talk – A presentation of 30–60 minutes, given to a group of people, who are motivated and intelligent, but who may not know much about your particular area.

What to say – Who is my primary audience ?
If someone remembers only one thing from my talk, what would I like it to be ?

Using Examples – Motivate and illustrate your talk with examples.

Say enough without saying too much – You need to say enough to convey the essential content of your idea, but you must not overwhelm your audience with too much material.

Visual Aids – It is all too easy to be seduced by the apparent neatness of typesetting. Remember that time you spend fiddling with the typesetting is time you are *not* spending on the content.

Typesetting adds to the temptation to put a slide which has too much information because it will still “fit”.

You should control the flow of your presentation, and the slides should not do it for you.

What to Put on a Slide – When preparing slides, remember that people can read and take in only very little information. Five to six “things” on one slide is quite enough.

Slides shouldn’t repeat what you plan to say, but they should emphasize it; don’t waste visual bandwidth on things you are also going to say.

Preparing Slides – Don’t start preparing slides too early. It is a Parkinsonian process; it simply expands to fill the time available eating away your valuable time for preparation.

Giving the talk – Nervousness: If you don’t feel nervous before giving a talk, especially to a large unfamiliar audience, you are a most unusual person.

Remember: The person who just gave that confident, assured presentation before you almost felt certainly the same nervousness. (Lack of preparation will add to it !)

Do try steady, deep breathing beforehand, and relaxation exercises, but don’t expect to feel calm.

Presenting your slides – The only reason you use an overhead projector is that to help the audience to view your slides. So don’t block their view. (Don’t bang the screen with the pointer stick, and don’t focus your laser pointer to the audience to damage their eyes !)

Timing – Don’t over run your allotted time – it is selfish and rude. Either you will be cut-off by the chairperson before you have reached your punch-line, or you will compress others’ talks, or you will make everyone late. In any case, your audience’s attention span is limited, so you probably won’t manage to convey much in your over-time period.

It is worth putting thought and effort into presentation skills. Your work, no matter how brilliant, becomes valuable to others only in so far as you communicate it to them.

Wish you all the best presentation of your seminar !