

Issues in making an oral presentation

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1

Goal and non-goal of this talk

Non-goal: to be professorial.

(Though maybe like a driving teacher.)

2

Goal and non-goal of this talk

Non-goal: to be professorial.

(Though maybe like a driving teacher.)

Goal: to make you aware of standard issues.

(Like a vaccine shot.)

3

The point

You have to give a talk:

- oral exam,
- interview, or
- presentation of report.

4

Commonalities

You are the speaker.

You have an audience.

You want to transmit an information.

You use a medium:

- your voice;
- your body language;
- a black/white/active board;
- slides (possibly computerized).

5

Specifics: which audience & which information?

- Teachers: they know the information,
and they want to check that you know it too.
- Future boss: you are the information,
and (s)he wants to know it.
- Colleagues: they don't know the information
and you want to give it to them.

6

Plan

- Oral exam.
- Interview.
- Report.

7

Oral exam

Essential: show that you understand the topic
and thus,

- don't rush to answer;
- avoid "X, it's when..."; and
- don't say "I knew you would ask this question".

8

Rather

- Define all the terms of the question before answering it, and
- identify the nature of the question: straight? trick? friendly/helpful? open?

9

More generally

- Be comfortably dressed.
- Remember to breathe.
- Don't drink carbonated water before or during the exam.

10

Plan

- Oral exam. ✓
- Interview.
- Report.

11

Interview

Essential: act natural so that you can be deciphered.

To this end: accept to become known.

12

Standard questions

- Your goals in life / work.
- Your working habits.
- How you get along working in group.
- Reliability / deadlines.
- Leadership potentialities.

13

Plan

- Oral exam. ✓
- Interview. ✓
- Report.

14

Presentation of report

Essential: your point should come through.

Necessary:

- The motivation and context of your work.
- The methodology supporting your results.
- The significance of your results.

(cf. The Little Prince at DAIMI.)

15

Why giving a good talk? (1/3)

In general: if it is worth doing, it is worth doing well.

Here: do justice to your topic.

16

Why giving a good talk? (2/3)

Fact: your work is partly judged
on the quality of its presentation.

“What is understood clearly is expressed simply.” (Boileau)

Corollary: what is expressed poorly is poorly understood.

17

Why giving a good talk? (3/3)

Be considerate:
do not waste the audience's brain cycles.

Care about their time (and thus about yours).

18

The rest of this talk

We focus on presenting a report.

Plan:

- before the talk;
- right before the talk;
- during the talk;
- after the talk;

and also:

- receiving a talk.

19

Rules of thumb

Be aware of

- which message you want to send, and
- what you want your audience to remember.

Make at least one point comprehensively.

20

How to say it

Use all the help you can round up, e.g., slides.

Alternatives include:

- passive demo (film);
- interactive demo (always risky).

21

What is the point of a slide?

It supports and guides your talk.

Try to cooperate with your slides!

22

Writing slides

Non-goal: don't start editing or writing the slides upfront.

Danger:

- atomic and linear view;
- irrelevant formatting concerns.

23

Active goal: the comic strip

Assemble your future slides into one comic strip:

- it gives an overview (1 to 2 pages);
- you can't write too much on each slide.

Rules of thumb: at most 1 slide per minute.

24

Active means: the plan

Planning is not like playing Lego. It reflects your understanding, and thus it evolves with time.

You should not plan your talk in the same chronological order as you carried out your work.

You probably chose a logical plan for the report; choose a pedagogical plan for the presentation (i.e., one adapted to the audience, the duration of the talk, etc.).

25

Basic macroscopic techniques

Have simple and informative slides.

Have a very clear overall plan.

Use a roadmap:

- we were there;
- we are here;
- we go there.

Except for the plan, avoid forward references.

26

Basic microscopic techniques

Minimal rule of thumb: one slide, one point.

Each slide should have a title.

1 good drawing is worth 1000 words

(e.g., plotted diagram vs. numeric table).

Put the title, location, and date of the talk on each slide
(it shows that you are not recycling slides).

27

Advanced techniques

Having secret slides (anticipating questions).

[With a laptop: keep them in the virtual screens.]

28

Writing the slides

By hand (if your handwriting is readable).

By machine.

Active slides (e.g., with a laptop).

[To be used with moderation.]

29

Writing the slides (ended)

It's silly, but... remember to spell-check your slides!

30

Standard mistakes

Small fonts (theorem: the fonts are always too small).

Invisible color (avoid pale colors, e.g., yellow).

Meaning attached to colors (color blindness; black and white copies).

Long and complete sentences (i.e., written style).

Unreadable slides (abysmal handwriting, bleeding ink, scratches, dust, or finger prints).

Slides written at the last moment.

Overcrowded slides.

31

The dynamics of the last moment

(the urgent kills the important)

There seems to be always a rush at the last moment — exploit it well:

- stage your work;
- let it rest (for it improves with time);
- ...at the very least **SLEEP ON IT.**

32

Before the talk

Try to immerse yourself in what you are going to say
(e.g., by giving the talk to yourself).

33

Final preparation step

Contact the person in charge (e.g., the chairperson).

Agree about

- the length of the talk, and
- the signals (5', 1', stop).

34

Right before the talk

Do:

- Be comfortably dressed.
- Breathe deeply.

Don't:

- Drink a carbonated beverage.

35

During the talk

Plan:

- You (the speaker).
- Handling the slides.
- What can go wrong.

36

Conducting the talk

- Straighten up.
- Face the audience.
- Smile. Express that you are happy to be here.
- Dare to speak slowly and loudly.

Accept that in the end, by giving a talk,
you express who you are.

37

How to say it

- Speak slowly and loudly.
- Speak for the others (not for yourself).
- Don't force your voice:
 - lower for males (to inspire confidence);
 - higher for females (to inspire mercy).

38

How to say it (ended)

- Be balanced: don't let your tone
 - fall down (it sounds sad and depressed);
 - jump up (nobody is strangling you).

Don't be afraid: nobody is going to eat you.

39

Conducting the talk: the opening

Very first thing: put the front slide.

Second thing: get installed (microphone, etc.).

Third thing: try your voice (see next slide).

Fourth thing: start the talk proper (e.g., with a slide entitled "Introduction" or better "Motivation").

40

Trying your voice

At a conference:

- avoid “Can everybody hear me?”;
- “This is joint work with XXX.” is good;
- “This work was carried out at DAIMI.” is excellent. 😊

41

The talk proper: how

Use a roadmap (an annotated plan of the talk).

Be intelligible.

Be articulate. If appropriate, remember to say:

- “There is more detail in the paper.”
- “Copies of the slides are available at the exit.”
- “Are there any questions?”

42

The talk proper: what

- Think backwards: what do you want people to remember from your talk?
- Don't say everything.
- Simplify.

Rule of thumb: people can only remember 5 new things from a talk.

43

A typical plan

- A clear motivation / introduction.
- A compelling example.
- A minimal development.
- A comprehensive related work.
- A summary of achievements.
- An analysis of the significance of the results.
- A conclusion and some open issues.

44

Conducting the talk: the ending

And

- either say “thank you; are there any questions?”,
- or say “thank you” and let the chairperson take over.

45

Don't

overestimate your audience:

you probably have spent more time thinking about your problem than most people here;

underestimate your audience:

there is always the risk that a world specialist is here.

46

Don't

underestimate yourself: you come from DAIMI and you are well-prepared;

overestimate yourself: prepare your talk well.

47

Handling slides

Plan:

- Basic techniques.
- Advanced techniques.
- Optional techniques.
- Things to avoid.

48

A historical precedent

July 1909:

Louis Blériot crosses the English channel by plane.

A historical precedent

July 1909:

Louis Blériot crosses the English channel by plane.

“No, I wasn’t worrying about the waves below.
I was watching my engine.”

Basic techniques (1/2)

Know in advance how many projectors there will be (2 is better than 1).

Have rehearsed your talk in similar conditions (e.g., with 2 projectors).

If you have rehearsed your talk with 1 projector, use 1 projector only (mostly).

Don't rush.

51

Basic techniques (2/2)

Don't talk right when you put a new slide.

[Information overflow.]

Hide as little of the screen as possible

(in particular, when pointing at things).

Have several "plan" slides, and annotate them in advance.

[To keep you and the audience on tracks.]

52

Optional techniques

Slide strip-tease.

Pro:

- It stages the presentation of a slide.

Cons:

- It is distracting and sometimes very frustrating.
- The electric fan *will* blow the cover away.
- Do you really want to show that your hand shakes and/or that you have hairy fingers?

Recommendation: leave the strip-tease for the experts; use overlays instead.

53

Try to avoid (1/3)

Long visual pauses (especially on a blank screen).

Ripping the glued paper off the slides (do it beforehand).

Slides displayed too quickly.

54

Try to avoid (2/3)

Correcting slides on the fly.

Making self-comments.

Putting your hand on your mouth while speaking
(even if it feels so good).

55

Try to avoid (3/3)

Overdoing anything:

- colors,
- fonts,
- background,
- animations,
- etc.

56

What can go wrong

Plan:

- Personal interference.
- Outside interference.

57

Personal interference

Being out of breath (stop and breathe; you have time enough for that).

Memory lapses (use the slides; annotate their frame).

Terrible accent (speak slowly; use the slides).

Poor handwriting (typeset your slides).

Cough, sneeze (not in the microphone!).

58

Outside interference

Plan:

- Interruptions.
- Running out of slides.
- Running out of time.

59

Interruptions

Golden rule: ALWAYS repeat the question.

- for you (to give you time to think);
- for the questioner (to make sure you understand the question);
- for the rest of the audience (who didn't hear the question).

60

Handling interruptions

What to do depends on the nature of the interruption:

- about your assumptions(!);
- about your point.

61

Running out of slides

This is not a disaster. Short talks are appreciated.

What to do:

- conclude unhurriedly and summarize the main point of the talk (don't repeat the talk, though);
- say "thank you; are there any questions?".

What not to do:

- make a personal comment ("hum, I am running out of time again" or some such; it looks bad).

62

Running out of time

Golden rule: you should conclude properly.

What to do:

- finish your current point as quickly as possible;
- say “for the rest, you should read the paper; let me jump to the conclusion”; and
- put on the conclusion slide and conclude properly.

63

Right after the talk

Plan:

- Handling questions.
- And if there are no questions?

64

Handling questions

The golden rule still applies: ALWAYS repeat the question — it gives you time to identify its nature.

- Technical question: give a technical answer.
- Friendly question: use it to make your point even better.
- Challenging question: be upfront.

65

Example question #1

Q. Wouldn't it have been simpler to use co-induction?

A, Version 1: The question is: "Wouldn't it have been simpler to use co-induction?"

That's a very good point. No. I tried, and it is actually simpler to use induction.

A, Version 2: The question is: "Wouldn't it have been simpler to use co-induction?"

That's a very good point. Perhaps. That's worth looking into.

66

Example question #2

Q. Wasn't this known already?

A. The question is: "Wasn't this known already?"

To the best of my knowledge, no, it was not known already.

(And I believe that my adviser agrees with that.)

67

Example question #3

Q. Blah blah blah. Blah blah. Blah blah blah blah blah.

Blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah
blah?

A. The question I believe is "Blah blah?"

...(and then for an appropriate answer)...

68

Do

Make sure that all the terms of the question are defined.

When you speak, be careful with idioms when you are not a native speaker.

69

Don't

Don't use slang, especially if English is not your native language: very likely it means something else than what you think it means (cf. "Inconceivable!").

70

And if there are no questions?

If you have a computer demo, now is a good point to remind the audience of it.

Say “thank you” again, and pack up your slides.

71

After the talk

Make yourself available for further discussion.

Promptly acknowledge good receipt of any e-mail.

Always check with your co-authors before answering in earnest.

72

Receiving a talk at a conference

Be prepared:

- Read the proceedings the evening before.
- Go and talk shop with the authors: they came here for that.

73

Conclusion

These are just guidelines: suit them to your needs.

In any case, do what I said, not what I did here:

- do write a comic strip before your talk;
- do use a bigger font when writing it up;
- do remember to breathe during your talk; and
- do repeat each question after your talk.

74

Thank you.