

**Tips for Giving Presentations**  
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**General Hints:**

A little anxiety is good. Anxiety causes us to do our best and to be 'on'. Being too laid back is just as bad as being too nervous. If you are nervous, assume your audience can't tell; they usually can't.

Do not 'mind read' from facial expressions. Do not think that you know what someone is thinking by how they look and do not let one person who looks bored or irritated bother you. Don't look at the person whose expression is bothering you. Look at everybody else. The one exception to not trying to 'mind read' is if you say something and everyone looks puzzled and/or starts whispering to each other. This means that much of your audience may not have gotten your point and you should stop your speech and ask if you should clarify.

Make eye contact with each member of the audience, not just the one person who is smiling and nodding their head.

Think about people you enjoy listening to in the classroom and think about what they do to make that experience enjoyable and then copy their technique and style.

The moderator of the session will present you to the audience and tell them both your name and the title of your presentation. While the moderator is introducing you, you can have your title visual up on the screen, and then simply proceed to give the talk without reintroducing yourself or repeating the title.

The moderator will be telling you how much time you have left during the talk (using note cards) and will NOT allow you to extend your time. Thus, you MUST practice your talk extensively, talking slowly and articulately, and time yourself to fit into the allotted time. You must also allow time for your audience to read and comprehend your graphs/figures/visuals and still stay within the time limit. A good tip many presenters offer is to plan on using 80% of your allotted time. If you think you can't possibly fit all of your information into our time limit, then consult your advisor on what to cut out, because you must cut something. Either your topic is too broad or you have too much unnecessary information in the talk.

**Speaking Hints:**

Don't think of your presentation as simply telling a group of people a bunch of facts. What you actually are is a storyteller. It is your job to tell an interesting, informative story that will grab your listeners' attention and imagination. Speak to your audience in a conversational tone and at a conversational speed. Include everyone in the story. Make them want to know the ending.

Play a mind game in which you picture yourself as someone who has something very important to impart to your audience. Your enthusiasm and enjoyment of your topic should come across in your presentation and this will, in turn, enthrall your audience. Don't be afraid to let your audience see how much you enjoy this topic and how excited you are about it.

Silence is NOT deadly. Silence allows people to think about what you have said. Pacing is everything. Speak slowly at a normal conversational speed (the most common mistake in giving presentations is speaking too quickly) and allow people to think about your points. Articulate every word precisely. When showing visuals, especially graphs, give people time to look at them. The two biggest problems for beginning speakers are speaking too fast and not allowing any

silence, because you think your listeners might be bored. Not true! Do allow yourself to move around and change positions and do use gestures. On the other hand, avoid doing things like putting your hands in your pocket or playing with a pointer, pen, pencil or any other object.

Be really, really, really familiar with your speech. Rehearse out loud until you feel conversationally comfortable with it. During the talk, have some notes handy, or at least your main points on a note card, but have most of what you want to say memorized. When I use the word memorized, I do not literally mean word for word memorized, I mean being conversationally comfortable enough with your talk that you can 'wing it' using slightly different words or phrasing each time, but with the essential meaning unchanged. Also, you can use your visuals as signposts and aids to memory about where you are in your talk.

Don't talk to your visuals. Talk to your audience. If you need a reminder about what to say, look at your visual, then turn to the audience and talk to them. Never, never, talk to them with your back turned to them and never, never talk to the slide.

Don't ever exceed your allotted time. Figure out a way to talk about your subject slowly, within the allotted time. It's hard to cut out information you think is fascinating, but you have to do it. You are not reading a paper, you are telling them a story about what you have done and they don't need to know every single detail you would put into a paper.

Don't be afraid of questions. Questions usually mean that people are genuinely involved and interested in your talk and they want to know more. Take questions as a complement that you have interested your listener.

If you don't know something, admit it.

If somebody asks you a completely off-the-wall question, simply say, "That's a very interesting idea, but I really don't know enough about that subject to answer."

Don't simply repeat what you have already written on a visual. The only reason to use a visual is to make something clear or because that is the only way you can present that idea or information. The major mistake that most people make with Power Point is to put their whole presentation on Power Point (word for word) and then simply repeat what is on the slide. **DO NOT DO THIS!** Put basic information on the visual and then embellish. If your whole presentation is on Power Point, then we might as well simply read it instead of sitting there listening to you read it.

### **Visuals:**

Each visual should illustrate a single point.

The less busy a visual is, the more information it communicates.

If data is very complex, try to break it up among more than one visual.

Avoid showing complicated tables—show the fewest possible numbers in the simplest form.

Don't show equations!

Use large enough lettering that it can be read from the back of the room.

Use the same style in each of your visual (lettering, format, colors, etc).

**Clearly** label axes on graphs.

Don't put irrelevant information on visual.

Clearly explain all the main points of your visuals. Do not say to your audience "As you can clearly see." and expect them to see what you do. Walk them through the visual and point to all the main points you want them to get from the visual.

Don't show more than one slide per minute.

Don't use abbreviations without defining them (this goes for your talk too).

If you need to use the same visual more than once, have a duplicate, don't go paging back to a visual you already used. This disrupts the flow of your talk and looks unorganized.

### **Structure of the Presentation:**

Have an informative title.

Presentations should always start with you telling your audience what larger principle, theory, concept, etc your work is related to. Make your audience interested in why you did this research by relating it to the larger picture. Then, during your presentation, narrow the focus onto the specific research you are describing.

All presentations should unfold logically and sequentially. Remember that you are telling a story, and just like any gripping story, information builds on former information until you arrive at a stunning and interesting conclusion. Remember that you are the expert in this setting and you know more than all or at least most of your audience about this particular topic. Tell this story in the same way that you would to someone totally ignorant about this topic and don't eliminate steps in the logical sequence that you need to build to your conclusion. Also, beware that since you are so familiar with this topic, you have started taking shortcuts in your thinking about it and in how you make connections between concepts and ideas. Make sure you don't accidentally skip any logical steps in the story simply because you are unfamiliar with it.

Your story should have only one focus and one major message.

Avoid jargon. Each field has its own jargon and the initiates into that field use the jargon amongst themselves. It is not appropriate to use jargon in a presentation in which your audience is made up of people who don't understand the field.

Be very careful when talking that you make clear which of your ideas/data/conclusions are supported by hard evidence and which are unsupported implications/suggestions/wishful thinking. Your audience will appreciate that you make this clear to them and will appreciate that you understand the distinction.

At the end of the presentation, return to the important principle/concept/theory that you first introduced at the beginning and tell your audience why what you did is important within the context of the larger picture.

Your conclusion is the punch line of your presentation and should be clear and authoritative and provide an ending to the story you just told everyone.

One suggestion from a UMM professor (Pete Wykoff) is that you think of your audience as being slow readers who are a little bit slow mentally as well. If you think about them that way, your pacing of the talk should be about right and your explanation of the visuals should be about right. Yes, you are speaking to people with college degrees and graduate degrees, but they don't understand your field, so be gentle.

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