



Guidelines for an Effective Talk¹

Clear Communication

- A. State your guiding question or hypothesis.
- B. State why your question or hypothesis is important.
- C. State the message of your talk at the beginning (this isn't a mystery novel).
- D. Outline your talk early in the presentation.
- E. Reference the outline throughout the talk to provide mileposts.
- F. Know your audience and plan your talk to reach that audience.
- G. Have a clear train of thought and be sure your audience can follow it.

Time

- A. Make sure your talk fits the time limit.
- B. Allow for extra time for unforeseen problems.
- C. Have the appropriate number of slides; one slide per minute is a good rule to follow.
- D. Give yourself enough time so you can speak slowly and repeat key ideas.

Slides

- A. Make text large enough to read at the back of a large room.
- B. Give thought to the color of the text and background of your slides. Make the slide background light so it contrasts with text and pointer.
- C. Each slide should make a single point.
- D. Have five or fewer lines of text per slide.
- E. The text should be concise; only one phrase or a few words per line.
- F. Make axes of graphs large enough to read from the back of a large room. Label your axes. If you have a series of slides, orient your audience to your slides so that they can quickly grasp the message of the slide.
- G. Prepare your slides specifically for an oral presentation.

Mechanics

- A. Do not read the talk.
- B. Begin with lights on to involve the audience.
- C. Practice your talk to refine flow, message, and length
- D. Do not apologize for the talk or its contents.
- E. Make your voice heard in a large room.
- F. Face the audience
- G. Do not use jargon or unexplained acronyms.
- H. Use the pointer as a precise, incisive tool.
- I. Do not make unnecessary movements or distracting mannerisms.

¹ Adapted from Pickett, S.T.A., B.E. Hall, and M.L. Pace. 1991. Strategy and checklist for effective scientific talks. ESA Bulletin 72: 8-12.

Organization of the Talk

- A. Keep your introduction brief and in proportion with the talk.
- B. Show your methods in an abbreviated form in only enough detail to support the results.
- C. If you illustrate your methods use a matrix, flow chart, or other type of diagram.
- D. Describe the format of graphs before focusing on the content.
- E. State your conclusions at the end in a form that reinforces the message.
- F. Keep your conclusions crisp and concise.
- G. Bring together questions, methods, and interpretation of results together to enhance the impact of the message.