

April 2024

SUGGESTIONS TO IMPROVE PRESENTATIONS FROM A8500 STUDENTS

Present material at a comfortable pace; don't speak too fast or rush through the slides. Rehearsals will tell you when you have to pare the amount of material presented.

Your /affect/ is important: you should appear confident and in command of the subject matter and of the main points you want to deliver to the audience.

Listen to yourself. Project: speak clearly and loudly enough to easily reach the back of the room. Be conscious of your intonation and vary it. (In larger rooms, always use a microphone if available.)

Look at the audience, not the screen or your laptop.

Don't read from the slides or your notes. Use those only as prompts.

Consciously avoid using "filler" words ("um," "uh," "like," "you know," etc); think ahead so you deliver ideas clearly and smoothly. Rehearsals are a big help here.

Don't fidget or move around too much; don't use repetitive gestures. Don't block the screen unless you intend that while pointing something out. Don't wave laser pointers around; use them to point.

Don't overcrowd slides.

Streamline text on slides -- don't be wordy. Abbreviate but maintain clarity. It's hard for the audience to read a big block of text and listen at the same time. But be sure all the main points you deliver verbally are also shown in text on the slides.

Light text on a dark background is easiest to read under most circumstances. But dark text on a white background often makes it easier to incorporate figures from the literature. You may need to experiment.

Describe the content (axes, symbols, source, etc) of a figure when

first shown; then provide complete interpretation of the figure and its implications/significance.

Be sure figures and images are shown at easily viewable scale. Add labels and captions for clarification, as needed. Good practice is to include a brief caption that summarizes the content of each figure.

Be sure room lights are lowered so that the audience can easily view your slides. Particularly important with lower contrast image material.

Equations will often benefit from explanatory labels or "speech bubbles."

Explain abbreviations, acronyms, and other special nomenclature when first encountered -- preferably as text on slides.

Leave your summary slide on the screen at the end of the talk so people can absorb it or refer to it during questions. It's the most important because it will probably be seen longer than any other. Be sure your name is on the slide when speaking to non-local audiences. Don't use stand-alone "Thank you!"-type slides.

During questions, try not to scroll through slides on the screen. Use "Presenter View" (PowerPoint) or other tools that allow you to jump directly to selected slides.

Practice the presentation in real time, more than once. Expect that you will need to update both the conceptual flow and your slides for time and clarity. Try to view your presentation as an audience member would.

Your rehearsals should include formulating answers to all the likely questions, especially skeptical ones, from your audience.

It can be a big help to actually memorize the first minute or two of an important presentation. This gets you off to a good start. But make it sound natural.

Consult the several versions of "How to Give A Bad Talk" posted for earlier incarnations of ASTR 8500.
