Giving Talks

William Thomson. A Guide for the Young Economist

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Clarity and Simplicity Should be your principal objective

Place your work in the context of the existing literature
- What we have learned from this earlier work
- contribution

Explain the general goals of your paper
Describe the specific questions your paper addresses

Why these questions are interesting and important

Simply indicate the direction of your heading
Examples: Outline of the Presentation

- Related literature
- Model when countries care about their own fulfillment
- Model when countries care about each other’s fulfillment
- Discussion and Applications
- Conclusion
You have a wide variety of media at your disposal (Just don’t overdo it)
Use colors to attract attention to something important
Use diagrams and pictures (if possible)
Present your assumptions, conclusions and future research in the form of lists
You can be informal in your tone and style of delivery.

You should certainly show enthusiasm about your work.

If you appear unconvinced....
Giving Talks
How Is an Oral Presentation Different from a Paper?

- Discuss the paths not taken
- The lessons you drew from failures
- Describe how you got interested in your problem
- Explain how you obtained your initial results
Preparing Yourself

- You should be able to explain your paper either informally or with all the details.
- Be ready to explain your research in the five minutes of a hallway conversation, and in the standard 25 minutes.
- If you only have a few seconds:
  - What would be the key words of your research?
  - If allowed one sentence to summarize your contribution, what it would be?
The benefits of Practice

- By repeatedly explaining something you are creating a mental file of sentences
- Eventually you will approach the optimal way
- Time yourself!
- Short introductions are preferable
- Keep the literature survey short
You need to think about how to convince me that your findings are significant.

Demonstrate the difficulties involved in reaching more general results.

Being Flexible

- Interacting with the Audience
- Answer questions carefully and thoughtfully.
- You should expect some misunderstandings
- Introduce suggestions in your work
Benefit of Transparencies

- Show and tell is always better than just telling

Transparencies save time

- When you are explaining some table highlight the most important points
- relieve you from memorizing
- Have a psychological benefit
- do not overcrowd your powerpoint!
Most good speakers average two minutes per slide (not counting title and outline slides), and thus use about a dozen slides for a twenty minute presentation.

- Title/author/affiliation (1 slide)
- Forecast (1 slide)
- What is the one idea you want people to leave with? This is the "abstract" of an oral presentation.
- Outline (1 slide)
- Give talk structure. (Audiences like predictability.)
- Background
  - Motivation and Problem Statement (1-2 slides) (Why should anyone care?)
  - Related Work (0-1 slides)
  - Cover superficially or omit; refer people to your paper.
  - Methods (1 slide)
• Cover quickly in short talks; refer people to your paper.

• Results (4-6 slides)

• Present key results and key insights. This is main body of the talk. Its internal structure varies greatly as a function of the researcher’s contribution. (Do not superficially cover all results; cover key result well. Do not just present numbers; interpret them to give insights. Do not put up large tables of numbers.)

• Summary (1 slide)

• Future Work (0-1 slides)

• Optionally give problems this research opens up.
How to Give a Bad Talk

- Why waste research time preparing slides? Ignore spelling, grammar and legibility. Who cares what 50 people think?
- Transparencies are expensive. If you can save five slides in each of four talks per year, you save $7.00/year!
- Always use complete sentences, never just key words. If possible, use whole paragraphs and read every word.
- Be humble – use a small font. Important people sit in front. Who cares about the riff-raff?
- It’s unfair to emphasize some words over others.
- Pictures are for weak minds
- You prepared the slides; people came for your whole talk; so just talk faster. Skip your summary and conclusions if necessary.
- Why waste research time practicing a talk? It could take several hours out of your two years of research.