Tips on Giving Talks

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Some Obvious Recommendations

- Make sure you have something to say
- Try to make the talk interesting
- Tailor the talk to the expected audience
- Organize, organize, and organize

Establish Rapport with the Audience

- Tell a joke or a story to break the ice
- Make the talk accessible to the audience
  - The beginning of the talk, at least, should be understandable to anyone in the audience
- Talk to the audience
  - Don't read from your paper or your notes
  - Speak so that you can be heard
- Be cognizant of the audience's concerns

Be Professional

- Be honest

- Acknowledge the work of others

Use Slides

- Keep the number of words to a minimum
  - One line phrases are best
  - But always be precise
- Consider using “landscape” slides
- If possible, have a paper or “annotated slides” ready to hand out at the end of the talk
- Have a concise conclusion slide

Do not Depend on Special Facilities

- Avoid using computers and computer networks
  - If it is necessary, bring you own equipment
- Make no assumptions about the arrangement in the room

Use the Talk to Sell the Paper

- Avoid technical details unless they are crucial
- Repeat key points several times

Use Notation, Tables, and Diagrams

- Explain what your notation, tables, and diagrams mean

- Use traditional notation when available
  - Introduce new notation if necessary
  - Practice good abuse of notation

- Keep tables and diagrams simple

- Cartoons can be very effective

Handle Questions with Care

- Questions and comments can be very helpful

- Use questions to gain feedback from the audience

- Before the talk, think about the most likely questions and how you would answer them
  - You might want to prepare slides for these questions

- Cut off long-winded comments

Manage Your Time

- Finish when your time is up
- Have some material that can be deleted and some material that can be added
- Don't "flash" slides
- If necessary, delay questions to the end of the talk

Be Conservative

- Use simple slides
- Avoid nontraditional presentations
- Don't be flippant, cute, or fancy
  - Don't use lots of fonts
  - Use color with great care
  - Use sound effects and animation very sparingly

Keep control of the talk

- Don't allow talking in the audience

- Deflect hostile questions

- Don't argue with members of the audience during the talk

- Don't let someone else hijack your talk

Some Special Tactics

- In some cases, it helps to make the audience feel that they are smart
- Make a “mandated” talk your own talk
  - Only talk about what you really understand
- Try to have your talk scheduled in the early part of a conference or meeting
  - Not first thing in the morning
  - Not immediately after lunch
  - Not at the very end

Practice

- Practice but do not let your talk become stiff
- Give a “dry run” of your talk before a real audience
- Solicit criticism from your colleagues

Final Tip

- Choose a simple, proven format for your talk
- Put your creative energy into the content of your talk