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

• Connect with your 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

• Be prepared for equipment malfunction
  – Always have backup slides or notes
  – Consider bringing your 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

• But put most of your creativity into the content of your talk, not into the format