

TALK

It usually takes more than three weeks to prepare a good impromptu speech. – Samuel Clemens

A conference talk's goal is to make the audience want to read your paper. The talk does not replace the paper. Typically, you will give the gist of the idea and explain why it is interesting/important. It is common to allude to information in the paper that cannot be covered adequately in the presentation. If the audience leaves saying "Cool, I need to read that," then you have succeeded.

Identify the important ideas: your work (or the work you are presenting) likely has many details, but only one or two ideas; structure your talk around these two ideas.

Create a talk outline: your talk should be organized in a top-down manner. You should have the following main sections in your talk:

1. *Introduction* – a statement of the problem (what), motivation and putting the work in context (why and why should we care), and a high-level view of the solution (how).
2. *Details of solution.*
3. *Results demonstrating your solution.*
4. *Conclusions and future directions for this work.*

The talk should be organized so that the important ideas are presented first, the details second, and the conclusions last. Each section of your talk should be organized in a similar manner – big ideas, details, then summarize.

Introduction

You have from 30 seconds up to 1,5 minutes to get your listeners' attention; it should give your listeners a reason for listening; smoothly introduce your topic. The thesis statement prepares the audience for the goal; it sets the tone and contains a hint.

Five ways to start a speech:

1. Refer directly to the subject of your talk.
2. Begin with a story or illustration.
3. Establish a common bond with the audience.
4. Pay an honest compliment.
5. Use humour that steers your audience to the subject.

Develop an introduction by stating who you are and why you are speaking; include a thesis statement and outline the main points you will cover in the presentation; think of providing some opening remarks such as a rhetoric question or surprising facts.

Slide organization: your slides should be organized like an outline – a few main points, with sub-points under each one. Your slides are a guide for your talk not a word-for-word copy of your talk. List specific points that you want to talk about as sub-topics of each main topic. If there are particular details that you want to discuss, outline them on the slide and keep written notes for you to refer to in your talk rather than writing all the details on the slide.

Summarize main points: you should have a summary slide of the main ideas at the end. If applicable, include a list of open questions and/or future directions of your work.

You are allowed to waste space: add just enough prose in your slides to present the main points and highlight the main parts of each point. Use phrases rather than complete sentences and use large fonts. You can use acronyms and abbreviations sparingly; however you should say the complete name when you talk about them.

A picture is worth a thousand words: use figures and graphs to explain implementation and results.

Number of slides: as a general rule, it should take 2-3 minutes to talk through the material on one slide, so for a 15 minute talk you should have about 7 slides.

Provide a talk road-map: tell the audience where you are going with your talk. Give audience a road-map of your talk at the beginning by using outline slides. Immediately after the title slide, put up an outline slide and tell the audience the main organization of your talk. Another alternative is to have first a few slides motivating the general topic, and then put up an outline slide. Use good transition from one slide to the next, and from one main topic to the next.

Helpful presentation phrases:

Introducing your first point

- To start with..., then, I'd like to consider...
- First of all, I'd like to look at...
- What I'll be proposing in my presentation...
- The subject of this presentation is...
- In my presentation today I'm going to explain...

Starting a new point

- Now let's turn to/move on to...
- I'd like now to consider/examine...
- Next we come to...
- Turning now to...
- Let's move on now to...
- The next point I'd like to make is...

Finishing a point

- Those are the main points on...
- That's all I have to say about...
- Now we've looked at/dealt with...

Referring to what you will say

- I'll come to that later...
- I'll return to this point in a few minutes.
- ...and I'll talk about this in the next part of my presentation.
- ...I'll comment on this in my conclusion.

Referring to what you have said

- As I said at the beginning...
- I told you a few moments ago that...
- In the first part of my talk, I said...
- As I've already said...
- As I mentioned earlier...

Preparing the audience for a visual

- Now I'll show you the...
- The next slide shows...
- If we now turn to the...
- The chart compares...
- The upper part of the slide gives information about...

Focusing the audience's attention

- You can see the...
- As you can see...
- I'd like to draw your attention to...
- Notice the...
- Observe the...

Summarizing

- So now I'd like to summarize the main points...
- In brief, we have looked at...

Concluding

- That's all I have to say for now.
- (I think) that covers most of the points.
- That concludes my talk.
- Thank you for your attention.

You may want to use the outline slides at other points in your talk to provide a visual transition between parts of your talk.

Repeat your point: there is a rule that says you have to tell your audience something three times before they really hear it.

- 1) Tell them what you are going to say;
- 2) Say it;
- 3) Summarize what you said.

Talk to the audience: do not read your slide off the computer, nor directly off the screen. It is acceptable to stop for a second and refer to your notes if you need to.

Practice: give a practice run-through of your talk in front of an audience of at least one other student. **As a practice talk audience member** you should jot down notes of places in the talk where you have suggestions for improvements, or where something seems unclear. After the presenter is done with his/her practice talk, you should talk through the things you wrote down. It is also good to give the presenter some practice answering audience questions.

Thinks to think about:

1. *Oral communication is different from written communication* – listeners have one chance to hear your talk and cannot ‘re-read’ when they get confused. There are two well-known ways to communicate your points effectively. The first is to K.I.S.S. – keep it short and simple. Focus on getting one to three key points. Second, repeat key insights – tell them what you are going to tell them (forecast), tell them, and tell them what you told them (summarize).
2. *Think about your audience.*
3. *Think about your rhetorical goals* – leave your audience with a clear picture of the gist of your contribution, and make them want to read your paper. Your presentation should not replace your paper, but rather whet the audience appetite for it.
4. *Practice* – it is hard distilling work down to 15 minutes.