

# 18 How to give a talk

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An idea is worthless if it is not told to other people. Many times great ideas do not get attention because the inventor doesn't communicate to others well. One and most important way of communicating your idea is through talks. You should not only write a good paper but also present your work nicely. It is always the case that a talk is heard by more number of people than the corresponding paper. If you can excite people in the talk to read the paper then you can get your idea noticed. As more people get to know your work you get feedback by larger number of people about the work which can help you in future work.

Don't underestimate the impact of good presentation. Good talk can help you in getting noticed by people. You should invest time in preparing your talk. Practice enough before giving talk. This is a skill which can be learned and improved.

In general, quality of talks in conferences is rather low. If you are only just good, you will stand out. So, a small effort in improving your presenting skill can help you a lot in your career.

## 1 Talk

"A good talk is full of little lies." -Thomas A. Henzinger.

A good talk is like an advertisement of your work. Purpose of a talk is not to explain your work but to excite others such that they want to read your paper. Technical details and weak points of your work may kill the interest of the audience. One may omit certain details to keep the talk fluent, even if this makes content of talk flawed. Do not try to impress people. Do not mention how much work have you done for the results.

## 2 Your Audience

Never assume that people are very excited about your talk. Most of them have never heard of you. They will be ready to go to sleep as soon as you start your talk. It is your responsibility to wake them up and make them excited about your work.

## 3 What to put in talk

Only the following things should be there in your presentation:

1. Motivation.

2. Your key idea.
3. There is no third one.

### **3.1 Motivation**

Do not explain all the Bible around your problem. Keep the motivation of your talk within the following 3 points.

1. What is the problem?
2. Why is it interesting?
3. What is your contribution?

### **3.2 Your key idea**

Audience will not remember more than one idea after the talk. Just try to communicate only one idea to your audience. Instead of giving shallow overviews of a topic, try to give deep details of one key idea.

This mistake is done very often: People try to summarize all details of their research and leave the audience puzzled. Especially in job talks people try to cover all the work they have done in their life. In that situation, one should put emphasis on one topic in detail, and show the rest of the work in brief summary.

## **4 Main weapon: Example**

Examples are very powerful weapon for putting an idea across. You can give your talk as a sequence of examples. Try to present examples which illustrates the following points about your idea.

1. Basic example.
2. Idea in action.
3. Extreme case.
4. Highlight the shortcomings of the idea.

## **5 Does/Don'ts**

Avoid doing the following in the talk:

1. Don't think a slide to outline the presentation is obligatory, it often turns out to be unnecessary. Nevertheless, it can be useful to show a slide in the middle for change of direction of your talk.

2. Never keep a slide full of formulae and technical details. Keep this simple rule in your mind: something you don't want to be read by the audience doesn't deserve to be on the slides.
3. Don't rely on computer-written slides, unless you have your own laptop.
4. Don't reveal points item after item, it makes your presentation boring. Try to innovate in presenting the sequence of ideas. In the same time don't make too flashy presentation.
5. Don't apologise. Don't explain why you do not explain something.
6. Never ask the question, "Would you like me to go on?"

Try to follow these guidelines:

1. Prepare/finalize/review your slides the night before your talk. This keeps the presentation fresh in your mind.
2. Be enthusiastic about your talk. This makes people to take interest in your talk. If you have prepared your talk a night before, you will certainly be enthusiastic about presenting it.
3. Don't stand at one place. Try to move around while talking.
4. Use pointers and keep pointing things on the screen. It makes talk much more interactive.
5. Try to identify a nodder in your audience and try to explain things to him face to face even if he is not understanding you. This will help to keep your moral up during the presentation.
6. **Always finish on time.**

## 6 Questions

Questions are great. Don't treat questions as trouble. They shows people's interest in your work. They help you getting feedback.

## 7 Preparing Slides

1. Put on slides only what you want everybody to read/see. Omit everything else.
2. Use short phrases with keywords instead of full sentences.
3. Everything in your slides should prompt you to say something.

## **8 Presentation issues**

1. Time your slides.(Examples take much longer.)
2. Slides should be printable.
3. Always use white background.
4. Use different font sizes/color only when it conveys semantic information.