

General Guidelines for a Good Presentation

General

1. The purpose of a presentation is to communicate with the audience. It is better to cover less material and make the audience understand what you have done than to try to cover too much.
2. Start general then get more specific.
3. Good things to include: motivation and objective (in the Introduction), some background information as needed, but as little as possible — focus on what you did, summary and conclusions.
4. It is important that the talk have a good logical flow — you are telling a story.

Materials

1. Use 18-point font or larger for any text and important annotations in figures. Plots with 14-16 point font for axis labels is acceptable. However, larger fonts are preferred in general, such as titles in 40 point and text in 24 point.
2. Use a San Serif font (like Arial or Helvetica) rather than a Serif font (like Times); the former is easier to read, especially when resolution of a projector is not as good.
3. Do not use all capitals, LIKE THIS SINCE IT IS HARD TO READ, Compared to Mixing Case Like this to Improve Readability.
4. Make bullet points as short as possible; typically keep each to no more than 2 lines.
5. Vertically center content on slide; do not just start at the top and leave a big blank area at the bottom.
6. When space permits on a slide, spread things out, in addition to point 5 above.
7. Do not make a slide too crowded.
8. Maintain an outline for the audience to see as heading and sub headings on the slides.
9. Show the slide number to help the audience in referring back to a specific slide when asking questions.
10. Figures should be the highlight, taking up most of a slide, whenever possible/logical. It is better to put key observations or related equations on the same slide as a figure if they will fit without making the figure too small. Remember, the figures are very important in presentations (the saying goes... “a picture is worth a thousand words”, but the better the picture, including the better it is annotated, the more words it is worth).
11. Figures should be well thought out, not just thrown together. Really think about what you are trying to convey.

Delivery

1. Speak loudly so the audience can focus on the content of what you are saying rather than struggling to just hear the words.
2. Look at the audience, at least occasionally, preferably the majority of the time.
3. Use the slides as cue cards; do not read your slides – it is very annoying to an audience. Besides, your slides should have short bullet points that require verbal expansion to effectively convey the idea.
4. Know your material well so you can present it smoothly.
5. “Pay attention” to the questions. I tell my children that paying attention means (1) look at the speaker, (2) listen to what is being said, and (3) think about what is being said.
6. It is good to repeat a question before answering it. This (1) allows the audience to hear it in case the question was asked too quietly, and (2) allows the asker of the question to confirm that you understood it correctly. Many do not do this, including me much of the time. It takes a lot of work to get in the habit of doing this. Once it is a habit, then it will be no problem. Start now rather than later in your career.
7. Try to speak with enthusiasm and inflection in your voice (rather than monotone). Sometimes it is hard, but once you get in practice and make it a habit, you can sound excited about almost any topic you present.