

Tips for How to Give Research Presentations

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I. OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH TALKS

- **Roadmap is essential.** Give the audience a slide with a structure of what you're going to cover. Then as you go through each "stop" on your roadmap, reintroduce this slide so the audience is following along where you are going at each step.
- **Present a big picture theme or question.** At the outset, make clear what is the big picture/theme/narrative of your talk. Then make clear how each subsequent study is highlighting one piece of this bigger picture. Again as you revisit each study, link it back to the bigger picture/theme.
- **Balance breadth vs. depth.** Want to expose to the breadth of what you can cover, but save at least 1 study to go into more detailed methodological depth as well.
- **Frame as a question & answer.** Easy to follow talks often spoon-feed the audience. You pose a question, describe a study, and then answer the question before they can ask it.
- **Don't forget.** A talk is an opportunity to showcase your skills - methodological diversity, distinct populations, and varying types of empirical questions. Don't be afraid to demonstrate your skills, expertise and enthusiasm.

II. SLIDES AND VISUAL AIDS: Dos and Don'ts

- **Simplicity.** No more than 3-4 bullet points. Do not write out complete sentences (think "punch line"). You can explain the results in a more nuanced way verbally, but simplicity on slides can be key.
- **Visual appeal.** Use eye-catching color formats. Contrast helps (e.g., black text on white background or white text on black background). Avoid colored fonts and colored backgrounds too similar in tone. Be careful to have no more than 2-3 colors per slide max!
- **Special effects.** Be very careful. Use sparingly and only at major transition points or topics you want to hit home. It is very easy to overkill this and annoy your audience.

III. FIELDING QUESTIONS

- **All questions are good questions.** A question means someone is engaged in your talk. That is a good thing. And a question is an opportunity for you to help clarify or discuss your own research! So try to see questions as opportunities to engage, rather than challenges to defend against. Remember how much worse it would be if the room was completely silent!
- **Be honest.** If you don't know the answer, don't fake it. Being defensive or false is unappealing, and it's not in the scientific spirit. Be honest in saying you don't know the answer, respond by stating why it's an interesting question, and actively engage in brainstorming what next steps could help you address the question empirically. If appropriate, you can offer to follow-up with them via email/meeting to talk more. You don't need to know *every* answer on the spot.
- **Be humble.** Humility is a virtue. Being humble is much more appealing than being overly confident/arrogant.
- **Q & A is a window into you as a colleague.** Much of scientific discourse is discussion-based, and how you behave in the Q&A provides a window to the audience of how you would behave as a colleague/advisor/etc in daily conversations.
- **Be yourself!** It is OK to let your personality come out.

IV. PRACTICING AND REHEARSING

- **Start early.** Give yourself time to practice. 2 weeks before a talk have a full draft so you can practice it many times in front of different audiences.
- **Compile notes/script for talk.** This way you can practice with a more eloquent script, and over time it becomes automated. You can save these notes in the “presenter tools” as a back up if you get lost or nervous on the day of the talk.
- **Watch yourself.** Practice in front of a mirror, or videotape yourself giving a talk. You will be surprised how much you learn watching yourself from a 3rd person perspective.
- **Relax.** I was once told to do no work the day before a big talk, but to eat good food, take a bath, and treat yourself well. Do what you need to do for you to ease your nerves. That is going to carry you further than over-rehearsing the day before.

V. FLASH TALK SPECIFIC TIPS

- **What is a flash talk?** A flash talk is a brief (e.g., 5-minute) talk covering a bite-sized bit of research. It will offer a fast-paced overview of the most exciting ideas and content of your outreach project. Flash talks refer to brief talks that get the major points across without going into excessive detail. This is a way to showcase the highlights of your project. The most successful flash talks are those that make a single and coherent point. Anything more begins to get to be information over-load for such a short time frame and lacks coherence. Keep it simple.
- **Timing and practice.** A great thing about flash talks is that they are virtually impossible to ‘wing it.’ You will need to carefully prepare and plan so each slide is relevant and the topic is engaging for your audience. Estimate about 1 minute per slide. Remember that you cannot give a flash talk without extensive practice to ensure that it fits within the time limit. Practice, practice, practice!
- **Number of slides.** You should plan to shoot for 5 slides (i.e., 1 slide per minute). An optional title slide does not usually count towards this. Avoid overdoing “build features” to pack excessive content into single slides, and also avoid using (or over-doing) Prezi and other dizzying presentation formats.

VI. OTHER

Recommended Book on Public Speaking

- Public Speaking for Psychologists: A Lighthearted Guide to Research Presentation, Job Talks, and Other Opportunities to Embarrass Yourself.

Advice for Job Talks

- <https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2012/03/05/essay-how-give-job-talk>
- <http://matt.might.net/articles/academic-presentation-tips/>

Advice for Poster Presentations

- <http://www.pitt.edu/~gsiegle/how-to-give-a-poster.pdf>