Tips for Designing and Delivering a Dynamic Research Talk

The Five Questions Every Research Talk Should Address
courtesy of Françoise Chanut, Ph.D.

What is your question?
Why should people care?
What did you do?
What did you find?
What does it mean?

The content of your talk

- Tell a story (don't give a speech)
- Only present the data critical to your story
- Highlight the *scientific question* you are aiming to answer by showing the question on its own slide
- Guide your audience by providing a *roadmap* near the beginning of your talk, and referring back to the roadmap each time you transition between major portions of your talk
- Tell your audience if results were surprising or remarkable, and why
- Never skip the conclusion!
- Always acknowledge others who did or contributed to the work
    - If a figure comes from a paper or someone else's work, reference that paper or person on the bottom right of the slide.
- "Thank you, and I am happy to answer any questions you have," signals to your audience that the main talk is finished.
- Q & A: the best way to prepare is to talk to other scientists about your work!
- The simple words, "Thank you," signal to your audience that the Q&A is finished.
- Be sure to practice out loud! Allow 2 days after each practice talk to implement changes.
- Memorize your first few sentences, last few sentences, and transitions.

Delivery

Body
Stand straight (not at an angle)
Get out from behind the podium
Move (your feet should not be glued)

Slides
Slides are NOT your script (do NOT read them!)
As you design your slides, remember:
Slides are a tool to improve learning
Minimize use of laser pointer

Eyes
Do not stare at your slides: Tell your story to your *audience* (not the screen)
Look at your audience (back row)
Look at different parts of the audience

Pace
Slow down and enunciate
Helps audience process what you've said
Helps people with trouble hearing
Say only what is important to the story.

Prepared by Cynthia Fuhrmann, Ph.D.

UCSF University of California San Francisco
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Slide Design

- Minimize special effects—only use effects if they will help you get your point across
- Pay attention to color and font style
- Simplify your slides
    - Avoid sentences
    - 1 idea per slide
- Use effective visuals
    - Minimize details in protocol slides, and use a visual to describe the method instead
    - Format pictures in PowerPoint using the Formatting Palette
    - Graphs should be reformatted in Excel (double-click on features to re-format them); *always* label both axes
- Give succinct, descriptive headings. For a data slide showing a result, a heading should be either:
    - The question the experiment is aiming to answer
    - A brief description of the result itself
- Label key features of your data (and only the key features)
- Plan the introduction of your visual, always using these 3 steps:
    1. Orient the audience to the figure
    2. Point out the important features, one at a time
    3. Bring home the main point
    - Use animation to introduce one feature at a time, or to highlight the main point
    - If you must use a complex figure or table from a published paper, then be sure to carefully orient your audience, and highlight the important features.
- Make your talk look professional by being consistent. On all slides of your talk, use the same:
    - Font
    - Figure style
    - Color schemes (on slides and within figures)