

Presentation tips

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Presentation is an art you will master with experience and some inspiration from good speakers. It will certainly take some time, but it is well worth the effort because, no matter what career path you choose, presentations will form an important part of your activities. There is no magic formula for a good presentation. Some speakers tend to be business-like (and effective), some others prefer to be informal (and still effective). Here are some good practices (the “nuts and bolts”) that you can follow to make a good beginning.

1. Stick to the time. Rehearse the presentation with your friends or even alone, and time your presentation. There may be several topics you would like to cover in your presentation, but you will have to drop some of them if there is not enough time.
2. Do not linger over the introduction slide. You can bring out the motivation of your work in a separate slide(s).
3. Load your presentation (ppt or pdf file) well in advance. This saves time for everyone. If there is no pointer in the room allotted for your presentation, check out a laser pointer from EE office (or another source), and remember to return it. Similarly, if you will be using the board, make sure there are chalks (or a marker pen). You should not have to discontinue the presentation for these. It is a distraction for the audience, and a waste of time.

If you use a marker pen, remember to cap it when you are not writing. These pens tend to lose ink quickly when kept open, and it is not only a needless waste but also a great inconvenience to the next speaker.

Make sure that the concerned room is actually booked for your presentation so that there is no unpleasant surprise when you want to start your presentation.

4. The material on a given slide should not be too much or too little. Typically, 30 seconds to 2 minutes per slide is appropriate.
5. Arrange the material so that you have a figure or equation or text to refer to when you are explaining a point. Do not explain things that the audience have to imagine! Remember that a picture is worth a thousand words. Put figures whenever possible; they will save you those thousands of words.
6. Do not be too verbose in your slides. Itemized points are generally much easier to look at than a paragraph. However, make sure that the various “items” do indeed have something in common (that is why you are listing them in one place).
7. Do not be too verbose in your speech either. It is difficult for the audience to grasp things that are said one after another without any reference to the material in your slide.
8. You must have an “organization” slide in which you tell us what all you will cover in the presentation and a “conclusions” slide in which you summarize the important points.

9. Remember to acknowledge co-workers (if this is a project) either in the title slide or after the conclusions slide.
10. Look at the audience; check if they are looking lost.
11. Do not go back and forth with the slides; it is a sign of poor organization. It is difficult for the audience to keep track of what you are trying to convey, if you jump from one slide to another and back.
12. Do not learn your presentation by heart! You will never get anything across if you do that.
13. In case of a project, make sure you bring out your own contribution clearly. It must make a firm impression on the audience.
14. You must include references whenever appropriate. If you do not, it amounts to plagiarism. A reference could be a complete citation or an abbreviated form if there is not enough space on the slide. (e.g., N. Mohapatra *et al*, *IEEE TED*, 2000)
15. Do not use a background which may distract the audience. Your text/equations/figures should not become obscure because of the background.
16. Use animation only if it is really called for and not simply because power point provides this feature!
17. Consider latex if you have a lot of equations. They come out much better. There are other reasons why you should use Linux programs, but more about that elsewhere!
18. Figures:
 - (a) If there are multiple curves in one figure, try to label them with arrows. Usually, a different line type or symbol is used by students for each curve and a legend appears in a corner saying which is which. While this is easy to generate, it makes life difficult for the audience; they are faced with the unpleasant task of figuring out which is which. In this process, not enough mental energy is left to understand the technical aspects.
 - (b) Be consistent with the line type/symbol/colour that you use for the different curves. As an example, suppose you are showing a plot of total rain fall versus month for three different years (say, 1980, 1990, and 2000) in one plot and then showing four such plots for four different places. In this case, the colour (or line type) that you choose for the 1980 curve must be the same in all four plots (and similarly for the 1990 and 2000 curves).
 - (c) Be careful before you decide to join the data points with line segments or use splines or a least squares fit. These are applicable in different situations. In general, it is good to have a “guide to the eye” instead of plain symbols.
 - (d) Remember to label the axes and write the appropriate units either in the axis labels or in the caption of the figure. The audience should not have to ask you what the axes represent and what the units are.

- (e) If you are comparing two figures, try to put them on the same slide as far as possible.
 - (f) If you must resize a plot or a figure, make sure that you do it simultaneously in both x and y directions. Otherwise, circles in the original figure will appear as ellipses, letters will appear too fat or too narrow, and other similar calamities will occur.
19. Try to avoid the situation where you ask the audience to go back several slides (in their minds) and relate what they saw there to the matter being presented in the current slide. If you do that, they will simply get turned off and give you blank looks. Instead, reproduce the old slide once again for convenience. You may even include the figure or equation from the old slide in a corner of the current slide.
 20. Do not get nervous if you have not been able to answer one of the many questions asked by the audience. It is perfectly fine to admit that you do not know and get on with the presentation. This should not happen with *most* of the questions, of course.
 21. This is an obvious point, but it needs to be included here because it is so important: You cannot take slides from another source (such as Internet) and present them as your own.
 22. A tip that is useful for seminar and project presentations: Check with EE office if there are any individual forms to be signed by your guide and examiners. If so, you should collect them and hand them over to your guide. *Remember to sign the forms if there is a place for student's signature.*
 23. Finally, one point not quite related to your presentation: Quite likely, tea/coffee will be served when you are presenting. One cup will be kept aside for you as well. While the student who is presenting is most welcome to enjoy a cup of tea or coffee and refresh himself/herself, it has generally been observed that the he/she does not exercise this option. Perhaps, he/she is afraid that it will be considered impolite to sip during presentation (although it is not). Anyway, the net result is that the tea/coffee *and* the cup get thrown away, a needless waste.

My personal request is: if you do not intend to accept the offer, please make it clear to the person serving tea/coffee.