

Presentation Recommendations

1 General Recommendations

1. Read David Patterson's guide to giving a bad talk.
2. Practice – One practice talk is not enough! Practice in front of your friends, in the shower, while walking home.
3. 2 minutes per slide – Keep the number of slides to a minimum. Plan to spend about 2 minutes on each slide.
4. Use pictures – Your slides are not there to help you remember what you want to say. If you read from your slides, you might as well just sit down. Your slides should illustrate the points you are trying to make.
5. Convey your message – Have a clear and concise message that you want to convey. If all else fails, fall back on your message. Repeat that message early and often.
6. Have a summary for each slide – For every slide, identify a one-sentence message that you want to communicate. If you find yourself losing track of what you want to say, say your one-sentence message and move on.
7. Practice transitions – For every slide, identify a one-sentence transition that will get you to the next slide. A good way to do clarify the flow of your talk is to practice just your one-sentence message and transition for every slide. This is also a good way to do a speed practice when you don't have time to practice the whole talk.

How to Give a Bad Talk

by David Patterson

I Thou shalt not be neat

Why waste research time preparing slides? Ignore spelling, grammar and legibility. Who cares what 50 people think?

II Thou shalt not waste space

Transparencies are expensive. If you can save five slides in each of four talks per year, you save \$7.00/year!

III Thou shalt not covet brevity

Do you want to continue the stereotype that engineers can't write? Always use complete sentences, never just key words. If possible, use whole paragraphs and read every word.

IV Thou shalt cover thy naked slides

You need the suspense! Overlays are too flashy.

V Thou shalt not write large

Be humble – use a small font. Important people sit in front. Who cares about the riff-raff?

VI Thou shalt not use color

Flagrant use of color indicates uncareful research. It's also unfair to emphasize some words over others.

VII Thou shalt not illustrate

Confucius says “A picture = 10K words,” but Dijkstra says “Pictures are for weak minds.” Who are you going to believe? Wisdom from the ages or the person who first counted goto's?

VIII Thou shalt not make eye contact

You should avert eyes to show respect. Blocking screen can also add mystery.

IX Thou shalt not skip slides in a long talk

You prepared the slides; people came for your whole talk; so just talk faster. Skip your summary and conclusions if necessary.

X Thou shalt not practice

Why waste research time practicing a talk? It could take several hours out of your two years of research. How can you appear spontaneous if you practice? If you do practice, argue with any suggestions you get and make sure your talk is longer than the time you have to present it.