

# Midterm Presentation Recommendations

## 1 Purpose of the Talk

The main goals of your talk are as follows:

1. Advertise your project – First and foremost, you should convince the audience that your project is interesting and worthwhile.
2. Convince the audience that your project is achievable – You should communicate the main goals of your project, detail which you have completed, and discuss your future work.
3. Improve your communication skills – It is absolutely essential that you be able to communicate the results of your work to others. *Everyone* can use improvement in this area. Use this as an opportunity to improve your communication skills.

Your grade will be based primarily on the following components: (1) your clarity of presentation; (2) the quality of the content you present; (3) your preparation including your slides and any demonstration; (4) your practice talk and improvement.

## 2 Suggested Format

Following is a suggested format for a 30 minute talk. This format would be very appropriate for a group of two students. However, your format may vary significantly based on the structure of your project and the number of people in your group. Keep in mind that every group member will be expected to participate equally. Therefore, you will need to carefully consider how to divide material such as the introduction and overview.

1. Introduction – Begin by telling your audience what you plan to discuss. My advisor was fond of the motto *Tell them what you're going to tell them, tell them, then tell them what you told them.* (1 slide – 1-2 minutes)
2. Overview and Goals – Provide an overview and description of the problem you are trying to solve. You should assume your audience is technically savvy, but does not have expertise in your particular area. Also, you should assume that your audience has no prior knowledge of the problem you are solving. Finally, provide a concise list of the goals you are trying to achieve. (4-5 slides – 10 minutes)
3. Design and Implementation – Outline the design of your solution. Describe the main components of your design and any unique or interesting features of your implementation. You should provide enough detail to communicate how your design achieves your goals, but do not overload your audience with detail. You should also point out which pieces of your design have been completed and which are future work/to be completed. (4-5 slides – 10 minutes)
4. Results and/or Demonstration – Report or demonstrate your results. If you have a demonstration, have it ready to show to your audience. If you have graphs, show them and discuss the impact of the results. (3-4 slides – 5-7 minutes)
5. Conclusion – Wrap-up and summarize your take-home message. (1-2 slides – 2 minutes)

### 3 General Recommendations

1. Read David Patterson's guide to giving a bad talk.
2. Practice – You are required to give one practice talk during the class period. 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.
8. Avoid too much detail – Remember, your talk is an advertisement. You should not even attempt to try to tell you audience everything you've done. You want to give them only enough information to convince them that the problem is interesting and that the solution works.

## 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.