

Pointers on giving a talk

Would you rather give a bad talk or a good talk? Not knowing your goal, we give you some pointers for both.

Making a bad talk	Making a good talk
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Launch into the material without stating goals or purpose. End abruptly after your last point. Throughout, keep your audience clueless about <i>what</i> you are doing and <i>why</i>. 	<p>Give your talk a beginning, a middle, and an end:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Summarize scope and goals Main concepts and conclusions Summarize points you would like to see the audience go away with, and provide pointers to additional information
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attempt to cover far more material than is practical in the time allotted. End the talk abruptly about halfway through your material. Be really really speedy to make sure every detail is covered. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Carefully scope what you can cover to the time allotted, allocating time for questions and discussion. Decide how many concepts or points you can adequately get across in the allotted time (one concept every 5 minutes is a reasonable rule of thumb), and prioritize to the most important ones. View your talk as an opportunity to motivate the audience to learn more about the topic on their own (and provide them the pointers to do so), rather than attempting to teach them everything in the talk itself.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Target the talk to <i>your</i> knowledge, sophistication and interests, and ignore that of the audience. Either bore the audience to death, or impress them with a snow job. Don't be concerned whether the audience comes away with new knowledge or renewed interest or enthusiasm about anything you have said. 	<p>Know your audience, and what you are trying to achieve with this audience, and carefully adjust the content of your talk accordingly:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How much do they already know about the subject? How much background do they have to understand the subject? From their perspective, what are they likely to find interesting and exciting? How much diversity is there in the audience? Can you provide something of value for both the well-informed and the clueless?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bombard your audience with lots of text on vu-graphs, so as to force them to choose between listening to you or reading. Don't waste your time on pictures and figures. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The written word and the spoken word clash, so rely primarily on the spoken word (this is a <i>talk</i>, after all). The spoken word and images and pictures reinforce each other, so come up with a visual representation of your concepts to work your words around.