

# Suggestions and tips to give better talks at conferences

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This is important for your career as a scientist

My personal opinion and suggestions

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See Emily Lakdawalla:

<http://www.planetary.org/blogs/emily-lakdawalla/2013/04040850-better-conference-talks.html>

(But follow your instinct)

# 1. Respect the audience

- a. They don't read your mind
- b. They don't have the same knowledge
- c. Their time is valuable

# 2. What do you want your audience to learn?

- a. Have the structure in your mind
- b. Have a main message
- c. Talk to largest possible audience
- d. Provide necessary information
- e. Make sure everybody will learn something
- f. At least make clear why it is important

# 3. Your story

- a. Mental experiment: main message in a Tweet (140 characters)
- b. This will be for final slide
- c. The audience will understand why it is important
- d. Preparing a talk is like making a movie
- e. Beginning, main body of the work, results (even if tragic), conclusions
- f. Anticipate something at the beginning (main theme)
- g. Repeat main theme, for those who get lost during the talk (to hear something familiar)

## 4. How long do you have to speak?

- a. Often talks are too long
- b. Avoid anything longer than 50 minutes (+ questions)
- c. Always leave time for questions
- d. Better to make your talk too short than too long
- e. Main story in the talk, regardless whether you have 15 minutes or 1 hour

## 5. Visualisation to enhance the story

- a. Make sure technicalities work
- b. Use well the new presentation tools
- c. Report your name, affiliation, collaborators
- d. Always give labels, use large fonts
- e. If you have animations, have a backup program (in case animation doesn't work)
- f. Be careful with animations (don't overdo)
- g. Don't fill every corner of your slides
- h. Have a blank slide for a break, a moment of meditation, to emphasize important facts

## 6. Do

- a. Practice the talk (particularly useful if you are unexperienced)
- b. Try to be comfortable and enjoy
- c. Look at people, don't turn your back
- d. Numbering slides can be useful (if audience knows the total number)
- e. I like a title on top of each slide
- f. Spell out acronyms or initials at least once, make sure audience remembers
- g. Generally, one or two figures per slide, no more
- h. In a slide, add information in temporal sequence
- i. Important: don't forget references to papers you use in the presentation
- j. Simple sentences in the conclusions, don't add obvious things like "thank you"
- k. If you have problems keeping the time, use a timer
- l. Rule of thumb for me: 1 minute per slide
- m. Announce when you are close to the end, audience will appreciate that it's almost over

## 7. Do not do

- a. Being nervous doesn't help
- b. Slides often too full, especially with text (people either read or listen, not both)
- c. Sentences don't need to be grammatically complete
- d. Audience doesn't care about details, methods, what others have done (in the paper!)
- e. If running out of time, cut slides, don't speak faster
- f. If possible, avoid tables, or make them very simple
- g. Be careful with colors (no good: dark BKG over dark font, or blue BKG over red font, also consider those people who are color blind!)
- h. Avoid complicated equations, use them if simple
- i. Remove information you don't use, explain everything that is the slide