

Communication in Computer Science

Planning your talk

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version of 05 Dec 2015 at 11:30

The point

You have to give a talk:

- scientific (seminar, retreat, or conference);
- interview (post-doc, job);
- other (oral exam / PhD defense, teaching, administrative meeting, lunch / dinner).

Commonalities

You are the speaker.

You have an audience

You want to transmit an information.

You use a medium:

- your voice;
- your body language;
- a black/white/active board;
- slides.

Specifics

The information is **new** to the audience:

- scientific talk;
- teaching;
- administrative meeting.

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The information is **new** to the audience:

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- teaching;
- administrative meeting.

The information is **known** to the audience:

- oral exam.

Information and meta-information

Interview talk: you want to express that

- you are well-rounded, and
- you have potential.

Why giving a good talk?

- **Positively:**
to do justice to your topic.
- **Non-negatively:**
to not waste your audience's brain cycles.

Before the talk: what to say

Assumption: you have a message.

- A thesis.
- A refutation.
- A theorem or a corollary.
- An idea.
- A report (implementation, benchmarks).
- A tutorial.

The content of the talk

- Think backwards: **what do you want people to remember from your talk?**
- Don't say everything.
- Simplify.

Rumour: people can only remember
5 new things from a talk.

Debunking the rumour

People remember very little from your talk.

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- They are trained professionals.
- They take notes.

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Do not underestimate your audience.

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- Your audience is at PhD level and beyond.
- They are trained professionals.
- They take notes.

Their challenge is the 49 other talks that day.

Help your audience get your message.

Rules of thumb

Of course rules are made to be broken,
but still: be aware of

- which message you want to send, and
- what you want your audience to remember.

Make at least one point comprehensively.

Have a compelling example

An example makes your audience
aware of your contribution.

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An example makes your audience
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(But your audience is still passive.)

Then it is up to you to make them
appreciate your contribution.

(Now your audience is active.)

A personal anecdote?

You are too young to do that, but:

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You are too young to do that, but:

- Only if it helps your message.

A personal anecdote?

You are too young to do that, but:

- Only if it helps your message.
- Never at the expense of others.

“Looking down on others does not elevate you.”

– Albus Dumbledore

A personal anecdote?

You are too young to do that, but:

- Only if it helps your message.
- Never at the expense of others.
- Only if it doesn't break confidentiality.

Before the talk: how to say it

Use all the help you can round up, e.g., slides.

Alternatives include:

- passive demo (film);
- interactive demo (always risky).

What is the point of a slide?

Like the light of Eärendil,
it supports and guides your talk
(for those lecture halls can be so dark).

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So try to cooperate with your slides!

Writing slides

Non-goal: editing or writing the slides upfront.

Danger:

- atomic and linear view;
- irrelevant formatting concerns.

Active goal: the comic strip

Assemble your future slides

on a hand-drawn comic strip:

- it gives you an overview (1 to 2 pages);
- you can't write too much on each slide;

So be **telegraphic** rather than **literary**.

Active means: the plan (1/2)

Planning is not like playing with LEGO bricks.

It reflects your understanding,
and thus it evolves with time.

Active means: the plan (1/2)

Planning is not like playing with LEGO bricks.

It reflects your understanding,
and thus it evolves with time.

You should not plan your talk
in the same **chronological** order
as you carried out your research.

Active means: the plan (2/2)

You probably chose

a **logical** plan

for the paper.

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You probably chose
a **logical** plan
for the paper.

Choose a **pedagogical** plan
for the presentation
(i.e., one adapted to the audience,
the duration of the talk, etc.).

Pedagogy at work

So you will have **several** versions of your talk:

- one for your research group,
- one for your department, maybe,
- one for the conference, and
- one for **each lab** you will visit
after the conference,
for reheated dishes don't taste that good.

An analogy

Classical musicians, by training,
and Stevie Wonder, who has an absolute ear,
always “give the same talk.”

Modern musicians (blues, rock, jazz, etc.)
virtually never “give the same talk.”



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Which kind of musician are you?



In the beginning, there is your title

Dare to start by explaining your title.

In the beginning, there is your title

Dare to start by explaining your title.

And dare to take the time to do so.

Pictures?

Only if they support your message.

Only pictures?

No: the slides are a support for your talk,
not something cryptic, symbolic, or mystical.

Only pictures?

No: the slides are a support for your talk,
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Plus, nobody will understand your accent...

Only pictures?

No: the slides are a support for your talk,
not something cryptic, symbolic, or mystical.

Plus, nobody will understand your accent...
They should at least understand your slides!

Visual design?



Only if you have educated visual artistry.

Plus, you are a geek, and so are they

Your audience uses the same software.

Plus, you are a geek, and so are they

Your audience uses the same software.

So they know how you did your artistry,
and that is super-distracting.

Subliminals?

Of course no.

Subliminals?

No.

No, no, no.

Not a chance.

Of course no.

No.

Non.

Don't even think about it.

Thinking out of the box

Real audience participation?

Thinking out of the box

Real audience participation?

No: you want to stay in control.

Thinking out of the box

Real audience participation?

No: you want to stay in control.

Fake audience participation?

Thinking out of the box

Real audience participation?

No: you want to stay in control.

Fake audience participation?

Only if it contributes to your message.

Thinking out of the box

Real audience participation?

No: you want to stay in control.

Fake audience participation?

Only if it contributes to your message.

A theater play?

Thinking out of the box

Real audience participation?

No: you want to stay in control.

Fake audience participation?

Only if it contributes to your message.

A theater play?

Only for the pros.

Summary

- Your talk: your way to deliver your message.

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- Your talk: your way to deliver your message.
- So plan your talk so that it delivers.

Exercise

Outline a talk based on

- who is your audience and
- what is your message.

What will you include in your talk

that will make it effective?