

Communication in Computer Science

How to give a telling talk

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Before the talk: the form

Be aware of

- the microphone,
- the beamer, and
- your slide pointer.

Check them out ahead of time.

Before the talk: the content

John Reynolds's advice:

Try to immerse yourself
in what you are going to say
(e.g., by giving the talk to yourself).

Final preparation step

Contact the session chairperson.

Agree about

- the length of the talk, and
- the signals (5', 1', stop).

Right before the talk

Do:

Don't:

Right before the talk

Do:

- Be comfortably dressed.
- Breathe deeply.

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Right before the talk

Do:

- Be comfortably dressed.
- Breathe deeply.

Don't:

- Drink a carbonated beverage:
its bubbles **will** come back to haunt you.

During the talk

Plan:

- You (the speaker).
- Handling the slides.
- What can go wrong.

Conducting the talk

- Straighten up.

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- **Dare** to speak **slowly** and **loudly**.

Accept that in the end, by giving a talk,
you express who you are.

Expressing who you are (1/2)

Yikes! I didn't sign for that!

Take solace

It's not about **the messenger** (i.e., you),

It's about **the message**.

Expressing who you are (2/2)

Finally: **me at long last**, for the world to see.

Me. **Expressing who you are (2/2)**

Me, me, me.

Moi.

Finally: **me at long last**, for the world to see.

Yes.

Me, me, and me. (And me too.)

Actually

It's not about **the messenger** (i.e., you),

It's about **the message**.

All in all

It's not about **the messenger** (i.e., you),

It's about **the message**.

So **just do justice to your topic**.

A historical precedent

July 1909:

Louis Blériot crosses the English channel
by plane.

A historical precedent

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Louis Blériot crosses the English channel
by plane.

“No, I wasn’t **worrying about the waves below.**
I was **watching my engine.**”

A historical precedent

July 1909:

Louis Blériot crosses the English channel
by plane.

“No, I wasn’t thinking about winning the prize.
I was watching my engine.”

Do justice to your topic

Watch your engine.

How to say it

- Speak for the others (not for yourself).
- Don't force your voice:
 - there is no need to speak lower, and
 - there is no need to speak higher.

How to say it (ended)

- Be balanced: don't let your tone
 - fall down (it sounds sad and depressed);
 - jump up (nobody is strangling you).
- There is no need for “uptalk”:
it sounds so tentative.

Don't be afraid: e pluribus unum.

Conducting the talk: the opening

Sub-plan:

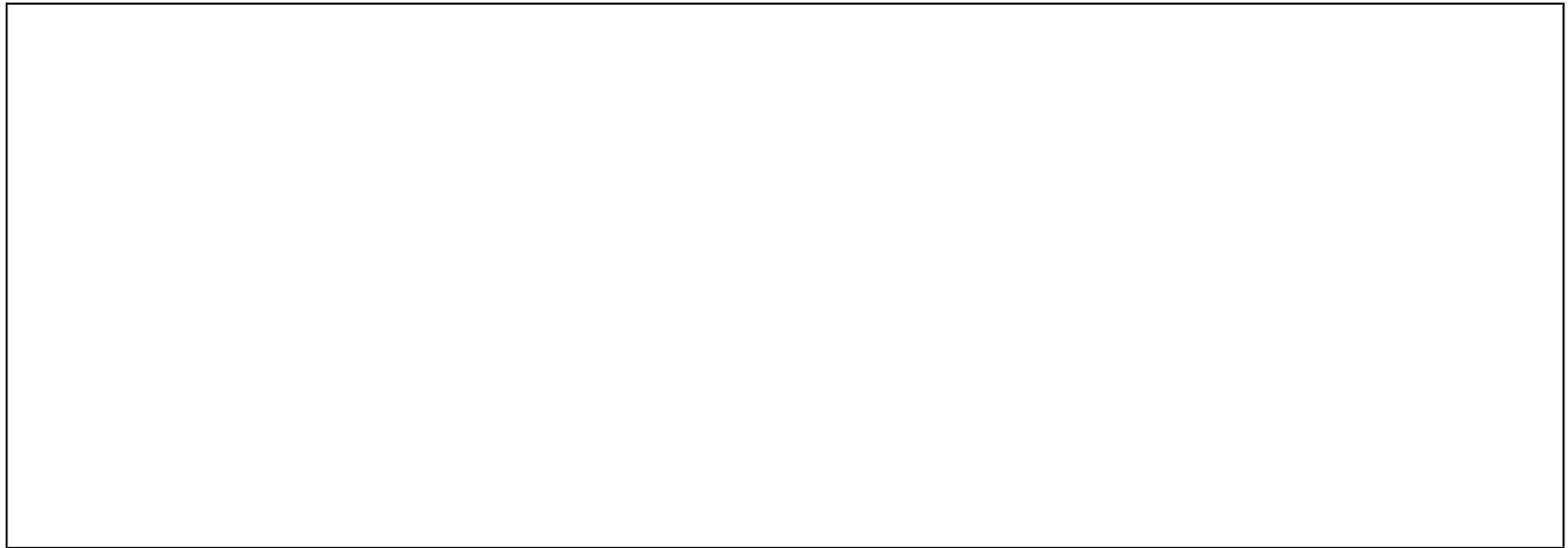
0. display your opening slide;
1. get installed (microphone, etc.);
2. manifest your complete attention;
3. try your voice;
4. start the talk proper.

0. Your opening slide

What do you want people to see
until you start your talk?

- the title of your talk (standard)
- an ad: “we are hiring postdocs” (why not?)
- a teaser about your talk (unusual)

My opening slide at GTTSE 2011



My opening slide at GTTSE 2011

After this talk,

- you may feel **greatly encouraged**, or
- you may awake **greatly rested**.

My opening slide at GTTSE 2011

After this talk,

- you may feel **greatly encouraged**, or
- you may awake **greatly rested**.

(Unusual, but it did prove effective.)

1. Get installed

- Tame the microphone before your talk.
- Ditto for the beamer (i.e., the projector).

2. Give your complete attention

- Unless needed for a demo,
your laptop should **of course** be **offline**.
- If you need to be online,
disable all window-popping daemons
(e.g., calendar and incoming events:
upgrade notifications, chat, etc.).

2. And show it!

Convey that you dedicate your **full** attention to your audience:

- Switch off your cell phone **ostensibly**.
- If necessary, remove its battery.

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- Switch off your cell phone **ostensibly**.
- If necessary, remove its battery.

(Truth be told, removing your battery is rarely necessary.)

3. Trying your voice

At a conference:

- Avoid “Can everybody hear me?”. (Why?)

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- Avoid “Can everybody hear me?”. (Why?)

(Because the funny guy on duty will shout “NO!”)

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- “This is joint work with my PhD advisor.” and
- “This work was carried out at NUS.” are fine.

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At a conference:

- Avoid “Can everybody hear me?”. (Why?)
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At a seminar:

- Thank your host.
- If you are happy to be here, say so.

4. Starting the talk (with your tried and true voice)

- What are your credentials?
- Captatio benevolentiae.
- Common points with your audience.

Beware of

starting the talk by cracking a joke:
it might be distracting.

(On the other hand, a humorous sentence
can **wake up the audience**
or **make it focus on what you want to say.**)

The talk proper

Use a roadmap (an annotated plan of the talk).

Be **intelligible**.

Be **articulate**. If appropriate, remember to say:

- “There is more detail in the paper.”
- “Copies of the slides are available at the exit.”
- “Are there any questions?”

Specifics: at a conference

Setting: short and limited time (20-25 min).

- You want people to read your paper.
- You want those who already read it to appreciate one specific thing.
- If your paper has **several** points, you can only make **one** of them.

Specifics: at a seminar (1/2)

Setting: longer but limited time (45-60 min).

Warning: your **assumptions**,
not your **contribution**, can be questioned.

The risk increases:

- for an interview talk; and
- at top places (MIT, CMU, Bell Labs).

Specifics: at a seminar (2/2)

Recommendations:

- be well-prepared,
- be very clear about your goal, and
- don't hesitate to say “this is not the point”, or even “just give me a chance”
(and then grab it).

And at a seminar + discussion (1/2)

Setting: 45-60 min + 1-2 hours.

Examples:

- ENS Paris (Patrick Cousot);
- Northeastern University (Mitchell Wand).

And at a seminar + discussion (2/2)

Recommendations:

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- be ready **to have fun and to learn new things.**

And at a seminar + discussion (2/2)

Recommendations:

- be **very well prepared**, and
- be ready **to have fun** and **to learn new things**.

Also, beware that someone (e.g., your host)
might shanghai your talk.

Specifics: at a colloquium

Setting: longer time (1h).

- Do your very best.
- Keep the distance.
- Don't get lost.

Conducting the talk: the ending

- Announce the ending
(e.g., with a slide entitled “Conclusion”).
- Summarize the background
(and thus the significance of your work).
- Summarize the achievements
(especially at your PhD defense).
- Open perspectives (future work).

Conducting the talk: the very end

And

- either say “thank you;
are there any questions?”,
- or say “thank you”
and let the chairperson take over.

Display a meaningful last slide!

Running out of slides

This is not a disaster.
Short talks are appreciated.

Running out of slides: what to do

- Conclude unhurriedly
and summarize the main point of the talk
(don't repeat the talk though);
- say “thank you; are there any questions?”.

Running out of slides: what **not** to do

- make a personal comment

(“hum, I am running out of slides again”
or some such); that looks so bad.

Rationale: what matters is **the message**,
not **the messenger**.

Running out of time

Golden rule: you should **conclude properly**.

Running out of time: what to do

- Finish your current point as quickly as possible;
- say “for the rest, you should read the paper; let me jump to the conclusion”; and
- put on the conclusion slide and **conclude properly**.

Running out of time: what **not** to do

- make a personal comment
("hum, I am running out of time again"
or some such); that looks so bad.

Rationale: what matters is **the message**,
not **the messenger**.

To stay on time: pace yourself

- Use the display **of your computer**
(not the one of the beamer).
- Use a digital watch or some such
to pace yourself (beep or vibration).

(After all, digital watches are a pretty neat idea.)

Using the display of your computer

If the beamer is your secondary display,
use your primary display
(i.e., your computer screen):

- to pace yourself;
- to flash the keywords of your talk,
as reminders.

Running out of batteries

Beforehand,

- check your slide pointer, and
- plug your laptop to an electric outlet.

Don't

overestimate your audience

underestimate your audience

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you probably have spent more time
thinking about your problem
than most people here;

underestimate your audience

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overestimate your audience:

you probably have spent more time
thinking about your problem
than most people here;

underestimate your audience:

there is always the risk
that a world specialist is here.

Don't

underestimate yourself

overestimate yourself

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underestimate yourself:

you come from a good university
and you are well-prepared;

overestimate yourself

Don't

underestimate yourself:

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and you are well-prepared;

overestimate yourself:

prepare your talk well.

Try to avoid (1/3)

Long visual pauses (esp. on a blank screen).

Sound effects.

Slides displayed too quickly.

Try to avoid (2/3)

Correcting slides on the fly.

Making self-comments.

Covering your mouth with your hand while speaking (even if it feels **so good**).

Hum, ah, er..., mmmh, etc.

Try to avoid (3/3)

Overdoing anything:

- colors,
- fonts,
- background,
- animations,
- etc.

After the talk

Plan:

- The question / answer session.
- At the session break.
- At the next meal.
- After hours.
- After the conference.
- ASAP.

Learning by counter-example

See Norman Ramsey's
“Maxims for Malfeasant Speakers.”

Exercise

Present

- the first 5-10mn and
- the last 5mn

of a talk, either yours or someone's else.