

The Art of the Scientific Presentation

So you got your paper accepted. *Now what?*

An opinionated take by Niels Olof Bouvin

Contribution

The purpose of scientific presentations

Piquing and keeping interest

Maintaining themes and points

Dos and don'ts

Aims for a paper presentation

Getting your audience to read your paper

- citations!

Getting in contact with likeminded people

- networking!

Appearing to be competent

- if possible

Why should they listen?

Start out by highlighting your contribution

- this should be juicier than your abstract

Perhaps a hook about the use of your system/result; something new, or a little unexpected

- set the scene or environment for your work—why is it interesting?

This will (hopefully) pique your audience's interest

Do not be boring

Your audience have a thousand distractions on their computers—do not tempt them!

So

- long lists of facts and figures are **right** out
- they should be in the paper, anyway—just refer to them

Be entertaining without being annoying

Do not be annoying

Animations: Only if there is a point

- slide transitions: Ditto (and it had better be good)

All text on a slide should appear simultaneously

- I'll control my own reading pace, thank you very much

Typeface: large and legible

- lemma: there should not be much text on a slide

Do not provoke the audience, unless you mean it

Brevity

If you can, use images and a little text

If you can't, clear text is better than confusing images

Graphs and figures should be VERY readable

Video clips should be short, strictly focused, and have clear sound or subtitles

Live demos are risky, but worth it, if to the point

The details are in the paper, refer to it

Style

Clipart is nearly always ugly and often adds little

- the audience should not have to guess the meaning of any picture

There is no excuse for MS Comic Sans or equivalent

- not even ironically

Only use a dark background, if you know what you are doing

- (you don't, and you don't know what the lighting is like in advance)

Rehearsal

You have 10-20 minutes: Make them count

- be 100% sure of how much time you actually have
- expect to use **at least** one minute per slide

Do a test run. Do another test run. Time it. Record it.

- not just silently looking at the slides. **Talk aloud**. Listen to yourself. Have others listen, and then listen to their critique
- perfect material for weekly group meetings

At the venue

Be well rested

Test the AV before showtime

- are you **sure** the video resolution is correct? Do you need sound?
- bring all possible adaptors, and a USB stick with your presentation in original format and PDF, just in case

Meet and greet the track chair

- as well as the other speakers

Giving the presentation

Keep track of the time

Look at your audience

Never, EVER, EVER read from a manuscript or your slides

- you are telling a story: the audience can read on its own

A little bit of humour: Good

- jokes: not so much (and neither should be on your slides)

Oldest rule of rhetoric

State that you are going to say something

Say it

State that you have said it

- this works surprisingly well

Presentation is storytelling

You are talking, and you need to capture your audience's attention and imagination

It helps to think of your presentation as you telling a story

- **flow**: one thing leading naturally to another
- **engagement**: make your work exciting and compelling
- **beginning, middle, end**: setting up a conflict or problem and resolving it satisfactorily

Addressing your audience

What in your work will appeal to **this** audience?

Your system? Your math? The rigour of your proof or experiments? Your clever design or evaluation process? The appealing user stories?

- show you belong: if another paper in the conference has shown something similar/interesting, refer to it

This is not **PANDERING**, it's **ADAPTATION**

Questions to ponder

WHAT have you done?

WHY did you do it & WHY should we care?

HOW did you do it?

WHO ELSE has done something similar?

- **briefly**! But wise to acknowledge others during the talk

Last slide

Should summarise your contribution, give perspective, and perhaps list a (very short) URL, or similar unique identifier

NOT bloody “Thank you for your attention and time for questions”

- we KNOW it's time for questions, we have done this BEFORE

Dealing with questions

Very good idea to have reflected on the points made by reviewers, even if you disagree

- it can be effective to have a few extra slides with figures from the paper to bolster your argument – better than referring to the paper

Be knowledgeable about related work

Correct misunderstandings, but be polite. Don't be afraid to appear ignorant. Offer to talk later (and do so)

After the presentation

Stay a while

Talk to your track chair & fellow presenters

Mingle! Many people will have heard your talk

Talk to other presenters when you meet them