How to give good seminar presentations – some hints

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Good seminar presentations – why should we care?

- **Presentation skills** are required in **professional life**
  - Present yourself, your research, your company, an idea, a product...
  - You are often (implicitly) evaluated based on a presentation

- In the context of this seminar, learn how to present **scientific content**

- Also learn
  - How to digest **different knowledge** sources and make a consistent picture out of it
  - To present the result in a **structured** way, adequate for the audience
  - To make and defend **your point** in front of a group
The 80-20 rule of presentations

- 80% presentation, 20% content?
  - No!

- Clearly, content is crucial

- But content does not get through if presentation is
  - Confusing
  - Boring
  - Too advanced (or too easy) for the audience
  - Too long (or too short)
  - ...
Outline of this talk

- Basics
- Preparing the slides
- Giving the presentation
Goal: Maximize benefit for the audience

- Consider structure, layout, design of the presentation
- What can be assumed the audience knows? What can’t?
- How can we arouse interest in the audience?
- Maximize knowledge transfer

Think of your audience – assume you are part of it
When preparing a talk...

- For **whom** is the presentation?
  - Target audience, knowledge, expectations

- What is the **message** you want to convey?

- What is the **purpose** of your presentation?
  - Teach, inspire, sell, convince,...?

- What (technical) **equipment** do you have available?
  - Room, projector, blackboard, light, ...

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- In the context of **this seminar**, the answers should be given!
Academic presentations

- **Limited time** (e.g., 20, 30, or 45 minutes)
  - Fix your milestones
  - Know when you should be where in your talk
  - Be prepared to questions from the audience delaying your talk
  - Be ready to shorten your talk dynamically

- **Message**
  - A novel scientific result, a report on your and/or others’ work
  - Make clear what is your contribution and what is general knowledge or results achieved by others
Plagiarism

- Make a clear difference between your results and those of others
- Report all references and cite them properly
  - Briefly in the talk, but fully in the written report
- Plagiarism has many forms
  - Copy & paste without explicit citation
  - Paraphrase of text without reference
  - Unacknowledged adoption of ideas, structure, design, ...
Keep your presentation prosaic, objective, factual

- Convince with **arguments**, not with rhetoric
- You are **not a salesperson**
Academic presentations (II)

- Try to **convince**, not to persuade

- Read and use the **literature** in a **critical** way
  - The authors are *almost* always right

- Read and use **different sources**
  - Typically, scientific articles are more reliable than information on the Web

- You should **understand 100%** of what you are saying

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I think you should be more explicit here in step two.
Intellectual challenge and clarity of thought

Information processing in your head
Information processing

- **Use your own words**
  - Do not paraphrase or just translate from other languages

- **Be careful with foreign languages**
  - E.g., “Operating system” (EN) → Betriebssystem (DE)
    - not: Operationssystem

- **Focus on relevant aspects**
  - Identification of the relevant aspects is the most important point
  - But give additional information or go into details when appropriate

- **Avoid abbreviations and acronyms whenever possible**
  - At least explain or define uncommon acronyms
Preparation

- **Observe** and evaluate other speakers
  - Do they perform well? Why? How?

- **Practice** your talk
  - Under realistic conditions

- Test your presentation
  - Animations, colors, ...
  - Screen ≠ projected image

- Know your audience
  - Competences, expectations

- Dress properly
Preparation (II)

- Complete your preparation on time
  - Not just the night before the talk

- Be on time the day of the presentation
  - Take some time to check projector and laptop configuration
  - What if something would not work?

- Be prepared for spontaneous drawings
  - Clean the blackboard
  - Make sure chalks / markers are available
Be prepared to questions and discussion

- Allow time for it

- Your answers should show that you are competent
  - How you reply to questions could be an important issue when your talk is used to evaluate you (e.g., as part of a job interview)
Outline

- Basics ✔

- Preparing the slides

- Giving the presentation
Slide layout

- Rule of thumb: only one train of thoughts per slide
  - Bullet points / key phrases instead of complete sentences

- **Slide title** should summarize the content of the slide
  - In a meaningful and self-contained way
  - Sometimes people only read the title of a slide (→ newspaper headlines)

- For academic presentations avoid logo, name, date, etc. on every slide
  - This is not a sales pitch
  - Adds background noise
  - Risk of drawing off attention from content
  - But: Corporate design?
Slide layout (II)

- **Font**
  - Sans serif (e.g., “Arial” or “Tahoma”), not such a font
  - Do not mix (too many) different fonts (size / style) on a slide

- **Font size**
  - Must be “big enough” (rule of thumb?)
  - 12pt, 16pt, 18pt, 20pt, 24pt, 28pt

- **Bullet points**
  - Do not exaggerate (no more than ~7 main items per slide)
Slide layout (III)

- Avoid overloading your slides
  - Not meant to provide full content

- Be careful (and frugal) with animations

- No point in quickly browsing through slides for which one has not enough time for presenting
Images, plots, and diagrams instead of text

- “A picture is worth a thousand words.”
  - But avoid too striking pictures (unless you want to shock / provoke your audience)

- Plots / diagrams must help you in making your point
  - They must be easy to explain / understand

- Photographs convey emotions, graphics and drawings convey exactness
Schemes and graphics, an example

A cluster has the following form:

\[
\text{ident} = \text{CLUSTER} \ [\text{parms}] \ IS \ \text{ident} \\
\quad \text{cluster\_body} \\
\quad \text{END} \ \text{ident} \\
\text{cluster\_body} = \text{REP} = \text{type\_spec} \\
\quad \text{routine} \ \{\text{routine}\} \\
\text{routine} = \text{procedure}
\]

Much better:
- Striking
- Less text
- Less forward references
The power of colors
Outline

- Basics
- Preparing the slides
- Giving the presentation
Start with an **outline** of the talk?

- A matter of taste

- Do not spend too much time explaining the outline
  - High risk of boring your audience
  - List few, self-explaining items

- A (negative) example:
  - **Introduction** [Necessary?]
  - **Topic 1**
    - Subtopic 1 bla bla [Avoid nested bullet points in the outline!]
  - **Topic 2**
  - ...
  - **Topic 7** [too many items!]
  - **Summary** [Necessary?]
Make a good start

- Be happy!

- Look at your audience
  - Not at slides, laptop, window, ...
  - Not at one single person (e.g., professor)

- Friendly start of the talk
  - Welcome
  - Present yourself
  - Present your topic
  - If applicable, put your presentation in context (e.g., relation to previous presentations in the seminar)
Beware of yourself!

- **Look**
  - At your audience

- **Speak**
  - Slowly (enough)
  - Loud (enough)
  - Fluently
  - Free (do not memorize your talk!)
  - Pause if necessary or appropriate

- **Move**
  - Slowly (avoid hopping around)
  - Use your mimic (hands / body)
  - Do not stand between the projector and the projected area
During the presentation

- **Engage** with your audience
  - Eye contact
  - Questions
  - Provocations, contradictions, surprises? (risky, but effective)

- **Motivate** your audience
  - Why is your presentation worth listening to?
  - Why are you worth listening to?

- **Remain authentic**, stay calm, be flexible
  - Be ready to react to questions, interruptions
Almost done

- Do not leave important questions unanswered at the end of the presentation
  - Open issues should be explicitly addressed (e.g., future work)

- Provide a summary of the presentation’s main message

- Try to close the circle: link the results at the end to the motivating questions at the beginning

- Make clear that the end of the talk has come
  - Keep on looking at the audience
  - Thank and the audience
  - Ask for questions
Summary

- Understand your topic
- Be well prepared
- Structure and balance your talk well
- Think of your audience
- Keep the time
- Stay calm, be flexible
- ... and it will be a great success!!
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Pictures from: www.leander.lib.tx.us/LILT/citing and www1.ku-eichstaett.de/PPF/PDMueller/lerntech/referat/