

GUIDELINES FOR GIVING A TRULY TERRIBLE TALK

Strict adherence to the following time-tested guidelines will ensure that both you and your 'work remain obscure and will guarantee an audience of minimum size at your next talk. Continuity of effort may result in being awarded the coveted 5:00 P.M. Friday speaking time at the next national meeting.

Slides or Transparencies

1. Use lots of illustrations. A rule of thumb is one for each 10 seconds of time allotted for your talk. If you don't have enough, borrow the rest from the previous speaker, or cycle back and forth between them.
2. Put as much information on each illustration as possible. Graphs with a dozen or so crossing lines, tables with at least 100 entries, and maps with 20 or 30 units are especially effective; but equations, particularly if they contain at least 15 terms and 20 variables, are almost as good. A high density of detailed and marginally relevant data usually preempts penetrating questions from the audience.
3. Use small print. Anyone who has not had the foresight to either sit in the front row or bring a set of binoculars is probably not smart enough to understand your talk anyway.
4. Use figures And tables directly from publications. They will help you accomplish goals 2 and 3 above and minimize the amount of preparation for the talk. If you haven't published the work, use illustrations from an old publication. Only a few people in the audience will notice anyway.
5. Make sure at least one slide or transparency is in upside down or sideways. This relieves tension in the room.

Presentation

1. Don't organize your talk in advance. It is usually best not to even think about it until your name has been announced by the session chair. Above all, don't write the talk out, for it may fall into enemy hands.
2. Never, ever, rehearse, even briefly. Talks are best when they arise spontaneously and in random order. Leave it as an exercise for the listener to assemble your thoughts properly and make some sense out of what you say.
3. Discuss each illustration in complete detail, especially those parts irrelevant to the main points of your talk. If you suspect that there is anyone in the audience who is not asleep return to a previous one and discuss it again.
4. Face the projection screen, mumble, and talk as fast -as possible, especially while making important points. An alternate strategy is to speak very slowly, leave every other sentence uncompleted, and punctuate each thought with "ahhh," "uhhh," or something equally informative.
5. Wave the light pointer around the room, or at least move the beam rapidly about the screen in small circles. If this is done properly, it will make 50% of the people in the front three rows (and those with binoculars) sick.
6. Use up all of your allotted time and at least half, if not all, of the next speaker's. This avoids foolish and annoying questions and forces the chairman to ride hard at the following speakers. Remember, the rest of the speakers don't have anything important to say anyway. If they had, they would have been assigned times earlier than yours.

If the above doesn't suit your style or goals, then perhaps the following alternate guidelines will be more useful.

MAKE A BETTER PRESENTATION

Slide or Transparency Preparation :

1. Slides or transparencies must be well designed, simple, and readable by everyone in the audience. It is worthwhile to use professional preparation services, if available.
2. Use as few illustrations as are really needed and can be discussed in the time allotted. As a general rule, one for each 1 or 2 minutes of presentation is all that will be effective.
3. Devote each illustration to a single fact, idea, or finding. Illustrate major points or trends, not detailed data. Do not show long or complicated formulas or equations. Each illustration should remain on the screen at least 20 seconds.
4. Use the absolute minimum number of words in titles, subtitles, and captions. Remember that standard abbreviations are acceptable.
5. Use bold characters. Do not use ornate or fancy scripts. A rule of thumb for the minimum height of readable lettering (size) is 3 millimeters on the finished slide. Do not make slides from illustrations or tables that were prepared for publication. They are rarely satisfactory. A good way to do your material is to stand away 1 foot for every inch of original copy width. If you can't read it from that distance then your audience will not be able to read it either when it is projected. Use proportional dimensions for transparencies.
6. Colour adds attractiveness, interest, and clarity to illustrations and should be used whenever possible. If you use colour, remember that contrasting colours are easier to see.
7. Critically examine every illustration and try out the entire set under adverse light conditions before using them in a meeting. It is sometimes impossible to provide excellent light conditions at meetings.
8. Mark a large positioning dot or make a notch in the lower left hand corner of each slide when it is laid flat so it may be read; rotate 180 degrees for loading into a carousel. The notch makes it easy to see that all slides are in correct position in a tray. Number every slide in proper sequence, and give them to the projectionist exactly as you wish them shown. This is important, because slides may be dropped or become disarranged. Come a few minutes before the end of the session to give the projectionist time to arrange the slides for presentation.
9. If using transparencies, prepare them ahead of time, using a highlighting pen to point out areas of interest during the talk.
10. If flying to the meeting, hand carry slides or transparencies on board so that they don't get lost if baggage goes astray.
11. An introductory and concluding illustration can much improve the focus of your talk.

Tables :

1. Do not use more than three or four vertical columns; up to eight horizontal lines. Any more and the information will not be readable.
2. Do not use ruled vertical or horizontal lines. They contract the eye and clutter the slide.
3. Whenever possible, present data by bar charts or graphs instead of tables. Coloured graphs are very effective.

Graphs

1. Generally, do not use more than one or two curves on one diagram; three to four as maximum but only if well demonstrated.

2. Label each curve; do not use symbols and legend.
3. Do not show data points unless scatter is important.

Presentation

1. Write the talk out in advance so that your ideas are logically organized and your points clear. At the very least, write out a detailed outline. Cover only the few essential main points, and leave the details for your publication.
2. Rehearse. If possible, give your talk to one or more colleagues, and ask them for suggestions for improvement. If the talk runs longer than the allotted time, eliminate the least essential material and rehearse again.
3. Speak slowly and clearly. Word choice should be simple: Use active words, short sentences. Words should reinforce visual material.
4. Out of, consideration for the other speakers and the audience, stay within Your allotted time. This is essential to ensure adequate time, for questions and discussion and adherence to schedule.
5. Use the public address system and speak into the microphone toward the audience at all times. If you need to see what is being, shown on the screen, have pictures or copies at the speaker's rostrum.

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