

how to avoid death by powerpoint



tips to give an effective talk

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1 THINK



Start at your audience's level of knowledge. Use the insights and metaphors that helped you understand your research area. Then only, gradually increase the complexity.

Have you already opened Powerpoint?

Bad idea! If you start directly with Powerpoint, you will want to arrange every detail before you even know what you want to talk about. Do not even think about opening it until step 3.

Do you know your audience?

Do you prepare a talk for lab members, other researchers or non-scientists? What are the expectations of the audience? Use that to determine the level of detail you present, the vocabulary you use, but also the tone of your talk.

What is the objective of your talk?

Do you want to encourage people to read your recent paper, give an overview of your research, start a collaboration? Determine at the early beginning what you want to achieve.

What is the key message of your talk?

No one can remember everything from a talk. If you don't know what key message you want your audience to take away, they will pick one arbitrarily among all your results. Try to summarise it in one single sentence.

"I want my audience to recognize the importance & diversity of microbiota."

"I want them to discover that protein X slows down cancer progression."

2 SELECT & ORDER

Do you explain the why?

Always explain why your findings are important. Based on the knowledge of your audience, you can dive into the details more or less quickly, but a brief summary of the context and the problem you are trying to solve is essential.

Have you dared to make choices?

It is crucial to select your results so that they all converge on your key message. Write down all elements you want to explain, then throw all that do not relate to your key message. Among the remaining elements, pick up the 3 to 5 more important. They will become the chapters of your talk.

Are your results connected into a coherent storyline?

Without a logical flow from one result to another, you will lose your audience. Connecting your results with a scientific story is an effective way to help your audience understand and remember your key message.



The audience needs opportunities to pause and digest, or to catch up with that you have said so far. Try to include transition slides or intermediate conclusions.



Your title is the basis on which people come to your talk. Try to keep your title short (max. 10 words), broad (but not too broad) and key message-oriented.

3 SLIDES

Are your slides too "busy" ?

If your slides carry more than one idea, they are probably overloaded. Each idea and result benefits from having its own slide. A huge deck of simple, clear slides will seem shorter to your audience than 10 overcrowded slides.

Is everything on your slides needed?

Never include results or illustrations that you do not speak about on your slides. Make the effort to create your own schemes with only the necessary elements. It is worth it.

Will everybody be able to read your slides?

If each slide conveys a single idea without distracting the audience, you can easily increase the size of all elements. Text, graphics, images, but also captions should be readable from the back of an auditorium.

Do your slides guide your audience?

Slides are not for you, but for your audience. They should help your audience to focus on your key message. They should not distract their attention with fancy animations or meaningless colors. Also be careful not to include too much text, people will read it instead of listening to you.

BONUS ! PLEASE READ IT !

HOW TO EASILY MAKE A BAD SLIDE

- ❖ Choose the less legible fonts (serif or funny fonts)
- ∞ Abuse of special bullets points, CAPITAL LETTERS and change police to make the audience think all your points are important.
- ∞ Never align elements, why bother
- Use the most colorful backgrounds possible and the maximum of spectacular transitions
- ❑ Instead of keywords, write exactly what you are saying

4. Include at least five lines of text, with 10 you are a master !

If you are out of space, decrease the size of the text.



As a rule-of-thumb, almost every slide you see in any presentation is too busy.

4 REHEARSE



Memorize the first 3 sentences of your talk.
The stress is always higher at the beginning of a presentation. If the opening of your presentation goes well, it will boost your confidence and make the rest of the speech easier.

Do you feel nervous (or worse) when thinking about your talk ?

It is quite normal! Ways to overcome this problem are often personal, but you can try the following tips: visualise your success in advance, take deep breaths before you start your talk, ask friends to come into the audience. Remember also that most people come to your talk to learn about your research in a friendly and constructive attitude. Do not consider them as sharks surrounding you.

How many times have you rehearsed?

While none is obviously a bad option, at least 3 “live” rehearsals in conditions as close to real life as possible is a good start. Rehearsals will allow you to adjust your speech and, as a bonus, reduce your nervousness.

Are you sure the technique works?

Even the most confident presenter can be thrown by unforeseen problems, especially when technology is involved. Make sure to have a plan B if your laptop crashes or your wi-fi connection disappears. Get to the room early on the D day and take control of the space.

5 SHINE ON THE D DAY

Take care of your image

No need to be perfect, to wear a suit or to control your gestures at all times, even if hands in the pockets is never a good idea. Just try to be the best version of yourself while remaining authentic.

Be passionate

Dare to be expressive. Your audience is more likely to be engaged with what you are saying if you speak with passion. Posture, gestures and intonation will almost automatically follow.

Look at your audience

If you are not looking at your audience, you might just send them the slides. Connecting with the audience is what a conference is all about.

The sound of silence

When you are going to say important things, try to keep quiet for some seconds before saying the point. It will hold the attention of the audience.



When the talk is over, do not think “I’m done. Let me find chocolate!”

Instead, list what did not work and what worked as soon as possible or ask your friends to give you a summary of your talk. Then improve your slides, explanations or metaphors. Learn from it for your next talk!

your bookmark checklist

Cut on the black line, print and fold on the dotted line, then keep close by.

- ☐ do I know my audience?
- ☐ what is the objective of my talk?
- ☐ what is the key message of my talk?

- ☐ do I explain the why?
- ☐ have I dared to make choices?
- ☐ are my results connected into a coherent storyline?

- ☐ are my slides too “busy” ?
- ☐ is everything on my slides needed?
- ☐ can everybody read my slides?
- ☐ do my slides guide the audience?

- ☐ have I worked on my nervousness?
- ☐ have I rehearsed at least 3 times?
- ☐ am I sure the technique works?

- ☐ have I taken care of my image?
- ☐ am I showing my passion?
- ☐ am I looking at the audience?
- ☐ am I using breaks to emphasize?

“Nothing in science has any value if it is not communicated.”

Anne Roe