

Some tips on how to prepare and give a good talk

Daniel Liberzon

Preparing your talk

Take time to prepare your talk. Even if you're a very good speaker, you won't be able to compensate for a lack of preparation.

1. Think carefully about what you want to say BEFORE you begin preparing your slides. Prepare an outline of your talk on paper. If you sit down in front of a computer too early, you'll waste time.
2. Check how long your presentation will be. The maximal number of slides is the number of minutes divided (not multiplied!) by 2.
3. Use large fonts. Make sure that your slides will be visible to everyone, then increase the fonts a little more.
4. Each slide should have one main theme or idea, not two or three. Avoid putting complete sentences on your slides, use short phrases and abbreviations as long as meaning is clear. Do not put on your slides anything that you won't have time to explain.
5. If you're giving a digital presentation, use animation but sparingly. Do not get carried away with special effects or fancy backgrounds, they just distract people from the content of your talk.
6. Tune your talk to your audience. Avoid giving too many details, but provide enough details for the experts to see what tools you're using.
7. Give credit where credit is due. However, avoid long lists of references, especially if you're not sure of their completeness.
8. ALWAYS practice your talk for timing and smooth delivery until you get it right.

Giving your talk

Different people have different presentation styles and skills. However, the following few simple rules apply in most cases and will help you give a good talk.

9. Speak loudly and clearly and face the audience. Make sure everyone can see and hear.
10. Spend at least two minutes on each slide (see 2).
11. Be sure to emphasize the main contributions of your work and the things you're most enthusiastic about. If you are not clearly interested in your work, then your audience won't be either.
12. Don't be dry or too formal. Don't be afraid to crack a joke or two. However, being informal does not mean being sloppy or imprecise.