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How to present a paper

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This presentation

- General hints about presentations, mostly following

  Spillman & Parberry: How to Present a Paper: A Speakers Guide, 2000. Available in Mycourses at https://mycourses.aalto.fi/mod/resource/view.php?id=692983

  1. What to say and how to say it
  2. Getting through the audience
  3. Visual and Aural aids
- Guidelines for the oral presentations in the course

What to say and how to say it

- Communicate the Key Ideas
  - Make sure that your talk emphasizes the key ideas
  - Skip over what is standard, obvious, or merely complicated.
- Don’t get Bogged Down in Details
  - Details are out of place in an oral presentation
  - Aim to give the audience an overview of the work (in a way: an advertisement)
- Know Your Audience
  - Make sure that your talk is prepared at the right level.
  - Think through the average level of expertise in your audience and present your results accordingly.

What to say and how to say it

- Structure Your Talk
  - A good speaker always lets the audience know exactly where they are and where they are
  - A (long) presentation should be broken into parts which are clearly delineated
- A simple template for talk structure

  A Introduction

  B Body

  C Conclusion
- However, **do not use a “table of contents” slide**. Presenting it uses valuable time that you can spend presenting actual content!

A The Introduction

- Define the problem the paper is about. For your slides, you will need to condense the description into a few carefully chosen words
- Motivate the audience: For example, try to shortly answer: Why this problem is important? or Why the answer is non-obvious (i.e. worth researching)? or What are the potential impact of solving the problem?
- Emphasize the contributions of the paper: What is new? What is better than previous?
- One goal of the introduction is to make the audience want to hear more

B The Body

“The secret of being bore is tell everything” – Voltaire circa 1718

- Abstract the key results of the paper. Explain their signficance
- You might need to be technical, but avoid swamping the audience with tons of equations or data
- If the key results involve math (theorems) or algorithms, sketch the main results and ideas, as simply and inituitively as possible
- Use pictures (and video, audio if relevant): Pictures sometimes tell more than 1000 words

C The Conclusion

- Summarize key aspects of the talk
- Hindsight is Clearer than Foresight
  - You can now make observations that would have been confusing if they were introduced earlier.
- Be Open About Problems
  - Science is not perfect, any piece of reseach has some associated uncertainties and open problems – tell the audience what they are
- Indicate that your Talk is Over
  - To avoid confusion if you have finished or not
  - An acceptable way to do this is to say “Thank you. Are there any questions?”

Getting through to audience

- Practice your talk
  - Allows you to tune many aspects of the presentation: flow, length, use of technology
  - This also helps with batttling nerves: it is much easier to deliver a practized talk whn nervous
  - Give a practice talk to a trial audience (e.g. a friend) or the mirror (you can record in zoom, and watch it afterwards)
- Use repetition:
  - ”Tell them what you’re going to tell them(the Introduction). Tell them (the Body). And then tell them what you told them (the Conclusion).”
- Don’t over-run:
  - A talk that runs over its specified time slot is annoying
  - The perceived quality of the talk is general inversely proportional to the time it over-runs

Getting through to audience

- Control your voice
  - Check your headphones and microphones prior to the talk (if any)
  - Speak clearly and with sufficient volume
- Take care with your appearance
  - Dress&groom so that audience do not remember you from how you dressed&groom but from the content of your presentation
  - In online settings, make sure the background does not contain distractions (in zoom you can insert a background mask)
- Keep the focus in the content
  - Don’t start with apology “I did not have time to prepare...”
  - Try not to make fighting with presentation technology the main point of your talk (learn how to use it before the talk)
  - You are borrowing time from the audience, make good use of it

Visual and aural aids

Note: Spillman & Parberry paper was written in 2000 when overhead projector and (sometimes handwritten) transparencies were the norm – presentations with a computer started to become popular in early 2000's. But most hints are still relevant here

- Make legible slides:
  - Use font type and size that is readable from a small screen or from a large distance
- Don't overload the slide
  - Don't write too much
  - Preferably, each slides is about a one significant issue you want to explain to the audience (for which you can use text, figures, animations to explain)

Visual and aural aids

- Don’t use too many slides
  - As a rule 1.5 to 2 minutes per slide is a good rule of thumb
  - This will give audience time to read the slide (a few times) and understand it
  - Practice your talk to find good time per slide for your presentation style
- Avoid “covering” the slide
  - e.g. revealing list bullets one at a time. This will force audience to be in lock-step with you, which is annoying especially if you know the topic already
  - let audience to read the whole slide and simultaneously listen to you. Make two slides if you think you need withholding part of the content on the slide

Visual and aural aids

- Use color effectively
  - Use color to make the content more easy to assimilate
  - Don’t use wild color schemes just to make thinks look fancy
- Use pictures and tables to illustrate a point that you are trying to make
  - Not just for the fun of it
- When using video, make sure that the also the audio will get through to the audience!
- In Zoom, learn to use the camera, microphone and slide sharing prior to the talk

Hints for your oral presentations

- The presentaitons will be 15 minutes plus 5 minute for questions
- I recommend having structure roughly like this:
  - Title slide (0 minutes)
  - 2-3 slides for introduction: explain the problem and motivate the audience (ca. 4-5minutes)
  - 2-3 slides for the methods (ca. 4-5 minutes)
  - 2-3 slides for the results (ca. 4-5 minutes)
  - 1 slide for conclusions (ca. 1 minute)
- For the slides, any software can be used
  - If you wish to use Latex, I recommend using overleaf editor and the “beamer” package https://www.overleaf.com/learn/latex/beamer