The How to Give a Talk Talk

Margo I. Seltzer
Harvard University
Division of Applied Sciences
May 4, 1994
Goals

• Problem: You are often asked to present a talk that summarizes your results, but you are never taught how to give such a talk.

• Solution: Present a “meta-talk” on how to give a talk and then present a real talk for you to critique.

• Outcomes
  1. You know how to prepare your talk for CS261.
  2. You know how to prepare research talks in general.
  3. The CS161 students get more out of your presentations.
Outline

• The Components of a Good Talk
• Slide Formats
• Presentation Techniques
• Conclusions
The Components of a Good Presentation

• Introduction
  • Goal: what is the purpose of this talk?
  • Why is this work important and/or interesting?
  • What is the necessary background to understand the talk (sometimes in a separate section).

• Problem Statement
  • Precise statement of what you are trying to do.

• Approach
  • How are you going to solve the problem?
  • Why is this a good way to solve it?
  • What were the alternatives?
More Components of a Good Presentation

- **Results**
  - Describe experimental setup.
  - Motivate what each test was trying to measure/prove.
  - Present results.
  - Explain expected (intuitive results).
  - Show how actual results (dis)agree with intuitive results. Explain WHY!

- **Conclusions**
  - Summarize results
  - Remind people of important of result
  - Discuss shortcomings of results
  - Discuss future work.
Slide Formats

Some people will get religious about this and disagree vehemently.

• Less is better
• Consistency
  brief, but complete sentences
  brief sentence fragments
• Full sentences, use correct punctuation.
• Spell-check
• Landscape mode
  more difficult to put too much text on a slide.
Presentation Tips

• Practice!
• Get Feedback on a practice run.
• Have paper copies of your slides.
  • read off those, not the transparency
  • make notes to yourself on those
• Plan at least 2 minutes per slide.
• Leave time for questions and answers.
• Know what you are going to say on each slide (make notes if you have to).
• Start with a joke.
More Presentation Tips

• Remember that your audience has not done all the background reading that you have!

• Know your audience
  • What are their expectations?

• Motivate your area.

• Motivate it again.

• Three parts to a talk
  2. Tell it to ‘em
  3. Tell ‘em what you told ‘em
Conclusion

- You cannot cover all your research in a 20 minute talk.
- The talk should make people want to read your report.
- Short is better than long.
- Think about what you want people to learn from your presentation.