How to Give a Talk So Good There Will Be Pizza Left for You

http://www.cs.virginia.edu/evans/talks/talktalk/

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Rule #1

Never talk about giving talks!

It might be a good rule simply to avoid any prestigious task. If it didn't suck, they wouldn't have had to make it prestigious.
Paul Graham, *How to Do What You Love*

Rule #2

Never give a talk during a meal!

Pieter Brueghel, *The Peasant Wedding*, 1568

Rule #3

Never read your talk!

Story

All Talks Should Tell a Story

Stories
- Have a beginning, middle, and end
- Everything is motivated by earlier events
- Build and resolve tension

List Talks
- Could be in any order
- Points are disconnected
- Tension is whether it will ever end

PowerPoint is designed for making List Talks!
Fight it (or use something else).

The Beginning

- Introduce characters
  - If your characters are not cute and furry, give your audience a reason to care about them
  - Technical talks: your characters may be abstract ideas
- Put them in a predicament
  - Motivate a problem: interesting and important
- Suspense: for tales, not technical talks
  - Give audience a clear idea of the big result

> If your audience is bored by the beginning of your talk, they will be doing other things before you get to the rest.

The Middle

- Build up to resolution of the problem
- Conference talk (20 minutes): **one** technical nugget (~10 minutes)
- Seminar talk: 2-3 small technical nuggets (~5 minutes each), 1 big one (~15 minutes)

> The goal is to get **one** interesting idea across, not to explain everything shallowly

What is the Goal of your Talk?

- "Get to the end without passing out"
- ***Sell*** something
  - Always: yourself, your institution (UVa!)
  - An idea, an approach, a direction
- Main goal
  - Conference talk: paper is worth reading
  - Lecture: understand something interesting
  - Invited seminar: believe something they didn't before

Slide Tips

- Fonts: simple, sans serif font
- Color text to convey **meaning**, not to distract (red = danger)
- Dark room:
  - Dark background (black, dark blue, dark green)
  - Light text (white, yellow, grey)
- Lighted room:
  - White background, black text

> Show your creativity with your **ideas**, not your font/color choices

Animate Judiciously

Entertain without Gimmicks

The real entertainment gimmick is the excitement, drama and mystery of the subject matter. People love to learn something, they are "entertained" enormously by being allowed to understand a little bit of something they never understood before... The faith in the value of the subject matter must be sincere and show through clearly. All gimmicks, etc. should be subservient to this.

Richard Feynman
Letter to Mr. Ralph Brown, Advisory Board in Connection with Programs on Science
(in *Perfectly Reasonable Deviations from the Beaten Track*)

Some Don'ts

- Don't **Apologize**
  - "I didn't have time to prepare a good talk…"
  - "I don't have time to explain this well…"
- Don't **Be Arrogant**: dismissing questions, belittling previous work, wasting your audience's time, giving talks about talks
- Don't **Be Distracting**: fancy backgrounds, useless animations, bouncing laser pointer, dress, physical/verbal mannerisms
- Don't **Be Boring**: if you are *bored*, you are *boring*
  - Don't spend two minutes on every slide: one 8-minute slide, some 2-minute slides, some 30-second slides
  - Have peaks and valleys (build and release tension)

Some Do's

- Do **be nervous**: if you aren't nervous, you don't care about your audience and/or aren't taking any risks
- Do **set up early**: your title slide should be on the screen before the audience arrives
- Do **use a remote presenter** (if using slides)
- Do **use anaphora**
- Do **have a handout**
  - Theory lunch talks: references, definitions, etc.
  - Conference talks: its the paper in proceedings
  - Seminars: usually no handout, but no rule you can't (at least have a web page)

The End

- Resolve the Predicament (or explain what is still open)
- Summarize why the problem and solution are important and interesting
- Good stories have a moral!
  - Not always possible for technical talks (but try to find one)

It is dangerous (except in meta-talks) to have a slide titled "The End" that is not your last slide!

Why You Should Give Good Talks

- You care about your audience
- More fun than giving a bad talk
- *All* talks are "job talks"
  - Typical talks are quickly forgotten
  - Great talks are remembered for years
  - Horrible talks are remembered *forever*

How to Learn to Give Good Talks

- Observe Bad Talks
  - Think about how you would cover the same material better
- Observe Good Talks
  - Go to all the faculty candidate talks
  - Think about how you would cover the same material better
- Practice, Practice, Practice
  - In your head, with imaginary audiences, with friendly audiences, with critical audiences

Moral of the Story

Respect your Audience!

Questions

http://www.cs.virginia.edu/evans/talks/talktalk/

Always end with a slide that
makes it clear you are done and has a URL