

How to give a good talk?

Prof. Kaisa Miettinen

Department of Mathematical Information
Technology, University of Jyväskylä

27.10.2008

In general

- Giving a conference talk is challenging – it is important to be understood and heard right
- It is important how you formulate your thoughts and how you motivate your ideas
- Make the presentation interesting and easy to follow!
- Think carefully what is the main idea of your talk and present it so that the audience understands what your main contribution is
- Connect the talk to what the audience already knows
- Think of a good way how to begin
- Keep individual parts of the talk simple
- Biggest obstacles of preparing a good talk: lack of time, energy and patience

Take into account

- Preliminary knowledge of the audience, that is, your target group
 - General presentation or
 - Detailed presentation
- Time to be used

Remember: clarity, logicity, carefulness !

Think of

- what kind of good talks have you heard?
 - What made them so good?
- what is relevant?
 - Do not try to say everything!
- what would you like the hearer to remember of your talk?
- how to present your message clearly and understandably?
- what is the best order of presenting elements of the talk?
 - Do not jump back and forth!

Use

- illustrations (but not too much)
- diagrams
- memory supports
- not too much material on each slide
- spell checking = no clerical errors
- bulleted lists (not complete sentences)

Structuring

- 1. slide
 - Title
 - compact, to the point, describing the contents
 - Author(s)
 - Contact information
- Table of contents
- The main message in a logical order
- Summary
- Main ideas for further research
- Possible acknowledgements and contact information

Giving the talk I

- Beginning is important!
- Remember to motivate and introduce your point – what you are about to present and why!
- Connect to the previous talk if possible
- *Do not read* out loud (from paper or slides); remember the connection to the audience
- Look at the people in the front and in the back (every now and then)
- Make a list of keywords/slide to support the talk (so that you do not forget important things to say)
- Avoid snapping a pen/keeping your hands in pockets etc.
 - extra activity typically annoys the audience
- Practice the pronunciation of the basic terminology

Giving the talk II

- If your talk is an invited one, remember to thank
- *Practice*, i.e., give the talk for a couple of times
 - So that you know how much you can say in the time given
 - Think of the choice of words so that you do not need to try to find the correct words while giving the talk (this gives an impression that you do not know what you are talking about)
- A smile does not hurt e.g. in the beginning and at the end
- If someone asks a question, be polite
 - Do not slate but be constructive
 - If you do not know how to answer, thank and promise to think about it later
 - If you do not understand the question, ask for a private discussion after the session

Being a chairperson I

- You may be invited to chair a session
- Your task is to allocate appropriate time for each speaker and make sure that they each get a fair amount of time
- Before the session, make sure that
 - speakers are present
 - presentations are downloaded and ready and nothing has to be installed between the talks
 - you know how to pronounce names of speakers – ask if necessary
 - speakers know how much time they have and how you plan to let them know how much time they have left

Being a chairperson II

- In the actual session
 - Introduce the session and welcome the audience
 - Introduce each speaker and the title of the talk
 - Take time and announce e.g. when 5 minutes of time is left
 - Stand up if the speaker does not stop otherwise
 - Give permissions to ask questions to those who want to ask or comment – if no-one asks, you must ask something
 - In the end, applause. Thank the speaker
- At the end of the session
 - Thank the speakers and the audience and close the session