Comments on presentations by a presentation veteran who is still trying to improve his own presentations.

(1) Note cards are nice in place of "TelePrompTers," but for a 10 minute talk you should be able to memorize your talk and have no need for the notes.

(2) Practice giving your talk several times ahead of time. When you give professional presentations later in life, they will much more important than the one for a class such as ours. For the professional, giving a smooth polished presentation will be extremely important. A job or a big account will on the line. Time limits are important too. If there are going to be a series of presentations, running even 1 minute over can add up fast.

(3) You can't expect to give all the detail of your work in a talk. To organize your talk, start with a conclusions or the ideas you want to leave the audience with and then work backward through the key points that lead to your conclusions or the ideas. Just pick out one or two key key points to elaborate on and refer the listener to written material for details on your work. Remember, most of us have short attention spans. At the beginning of your talk, tell people why your topic is interesting/give an introduction. Then it's OK to give you conclusion/bottom line at the beginning and the at the end again. e.g.

"I am going to talk about the shape of the Earth. The Earth may appear flat to us, but it is really round. This has all kinds so important implications such as how best to get from one place to another and models of the Earth and Universe. I am now going to give you the evidence that the earth is round. [details here]. In conclusion, the Earth is round and we can immediately start to figure out how long it will take to go around and the best and shortest routes to each place." This last point answers the oft thought of question: "Where do we go from here?" Even an biography might conclude with open questions (to follow up with further research) about the person, e.g. did Einstein really steal ideas from his first wife? How bad was Einstein really toward his daughter who was mentally retarded" etc. etc."

(4) Unless you are giving a presentation to an audience made up of many non-native English speakers, don't use words at all (or at least very few = 3-5 words per bullet, 3-5 bullets per slide) in your slides. I do not like slides that are all words but this is a matter of taste. In any event, don't give a talk on how to give talks and display each of the items I've written here and read for the screen while turning your back to the audience.

If I were giving a talk on how to give talks, I could write up this material and then show it as a slide and then turn my back to you and read for the screen. (Something **not** to do.)

Or, I might just talk and give a hand out of this material and tick off some points such as the ones above plus other key points:

(a) Make eye contact. Look around the room and look people in the eye when you talk (Ronald Reagan was extremely effective at doing this).

(b) Try to only use vu-graphs/power points for images, data (graphs) [not to list key points such as "String Theory or Quantum Gravity is the theory of every thing;" just say it. You'd be surprised at how ofter after a session I've been asked what University I'm from even though my opening slide listed that information.

The point being, people do not like to read and listen at the same time. For example, I never bother read to the audience my opening slide which just has a title, my name and affiliation as it is too boring, plus I expect the audience to read it while we wait for me to start. However, for whatever reason this information seems to be missed perhaps they don't look at the screen at first, and when I start talking they can't read the screen and listen too.

(c) Only look at the screen when you need to point to something.

(d) Stand next to the side and and close to the screen as possible so all can see bot you and the screen but don't block the view of the screen.

(e) Be animated [act like the topic really interests you, even if it doesn't :)] But animated does not mean "jumpy", e.g don't fidget

(f) Project your speech, soft dulcet tones are tough to follow.

(5) Some power point issues: be somewhat paranoiac about whether your presentation will work. Have back up with e-mail or a web posting and or memory stick that has your presentation. If you provide your own lap top, make sure it will work with the projector system you are going to use **ahead of time**. Why don't some symbols show up? This likely is because you used a machine specific character set, e.g. I find that "math1" and "math2" do not translate between Mac and Windows, but if I stick to "New Times Roman" and "Symbol," normal and Greek characters will show up on both Mac and PCs. Power Point or Keynotes has becomes a stand now because it means you don't waste plastic on vu-graphs, you can usually get prettier pictures. But go slowly, assume at least 1.5-2 minutes per slide even though it's much easier to go much faster with Power Point. If the audience won't have time to absorb the slide (because you went too fast), is it really worth showing it?

(5a) It is **OK** not to have a slide on the screen while you talk. If you have no image or data to refer to, leave the screen blank.

(6) Do you want to get really good at the active part (as opposed to writing the "script") of making presentations? Take a speaking/theater/acting course course here at NU!

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