

## One-Page Primer on How to Give a Technical Presentation

- ◆ Organize your talk around the use of overhead projection 8 1/2 x 11" transparencies; words alone are too evanescent.
- ◆ Allow ~ 2 minutes per transparency—hence, no more than 7 or 8 for a typical 15 minute presentation.
- ◆ The first should give the title, authors, objective, and a brief bullet-form outline of what is to be discussed; the last one is summary/conclusions/recommendations.
- ◆ Use a large, readable type font, all capitals if otherwise suitable. There are now several good computer graphics programs to help format such pages.
- ◆ Make good use of figures and graphs and simple tables; always walk your audience through the exhibit, telling them what is shown and what it means.
- ◆ Never read your presentation or even use cue cards: the overheads themselves serve this latter function.
- ◆ Use color to good effect—it can be added using indelible marking pens.
- ◆ Speak loudly enough: preach to the back row of the audience.
- ◆ Avoid excessive mannerisms: it helps to use a pointer—both to call attention to points on the slides, and to keep your hands occupied.
- ◆ Adjust the level to suit the audience. Don't cater to the ultra-specialist faction only. Results are more important than detailed derivations.
- ◆ Remember there is some salesmanship involved. You need to motivate the audience: first to pay attention to this important topic and, then, as a result of your exposition, do something: trust your analysis, have faith in or change what they believe on this subject, support a future course of action, etc.
- ◆ Do a trial run in advance—with a friend as an audience/constructive critic, if possible. If you have trouble keeping within the time span allotted, consider having an optional slide which you can include or omit late in the presentation to adjust. Never allow yourself to run over and be cut off without showing and talking through the summary/conclusions/recommendations slide! Don't rush through and surrender more than 15% of your time either.
- ◆ In a small-audience situation (say less than 10-20 attendees) make xerox copies of your OHP transparencies as handouts at the outset of your talk.
- ◆ Most talks have a short question and answer period at the conclusion. If you can, anticipate likely questions and have succinct answers in mind—maybe even added OHP slides to help answer them. Be sure you understand the question—rephrase it in your own words (a good idea if the audience can't hear the questioner very well, in any event). Don't allow an omnipresent egomaniac to monopolize the Q&A session (the moderator should help you on this): it is usually effective to suggest, "can we continue this discussion afterwards?"

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Tips for Effective Use of Visual Aids in Technical Presentations, by ANS.

## One Page Primer

### On How to Write a Technical Paper or Report

- Ask your supervisor to identify a well-written paper on a similar topic in a premier journal in the field; then use it as a format and style guide, with particular attention to tense, how equations are integrated into the text, common abbreviations, setup of tables and figures (e.g., axis labeling), how to cite references, etc.
- At the very outset of the project write a table of contents having sections enumerated down to two or three levels of subdivisions; use it as an outline and write sections as the work itself progresses, when specifics are fresh in mind. Reorganize and revise as the need becomes apparent. Write early and write often!
- Give particular thought to the choice of title to be sure it includes key words that will correctly place your publication in compilations prepared by abstracting services. Similarly, work hard on the abstract; it has two functions: as a table of contents in words, and as a brief summary of important results.
- Write at a level consistent with the audience in mind: perhaps yourself beforehand, and almost never someone like your supervisor who is already overly familiar with the material.
- A technical report is not an historical narrative — don't clutter it up with false starts, etc., (unless they mirror universal misperceptions): write with 20-20 hindsight. Nor is it a polemic: use dispassionate language, usually in the third person, and use past tense.
- Include enough detail so that the next person building on your foundation can do so with alacrity.
- Be quantitative: avoid numerically unqualified judgments such as "large," "inconsequential."
- Keep tedious detail to a minimum in the main text; but include it in appendices if needed to make the report a stand-alone document.
- Include only references that are highly relevant; but be sure you also relate your work to other than the most recent in-house precursors.