

## Rules for preparing and delivering presentations

The following rules, hints, and suggestions are meant to help you prepare and deliver a presentation in class or at a conference. These come from my personal experience, having sat through many bad presentations and several good ones. First of all, most standard rules of good technical writing apply also to presentations, so familiarize yourself with the document *Rules for writing manuscripts*, also available from my homepage. However, keep in mind that presentations should be very terse. Short or even partial sentences are acceptable, especially in bullet lists.

- Use a large sans-serif font (helvetica, or the LaTeX `\sf` font).
- Avoid changing to smaller font sizes as much as possible.
- Do not cut and paste equations or figures from papers using “screen capture”. The result is always sloppy and unreadable. Retype the equations instead. If this is too cumbersome, you are using the wrong software.
- The paper you are presenting might contain a wealth of ideas. You need to pick and choose the ones that makes sense to present to an audience in the amount of time allotted. A generic outline of your presentation could be: *motivation* for the problem being addressed, *background* required to follow the talk (introduce the required notation here, keeping it to a minimum), *overview* of the ideas of the paper, *details* of (some of) the ideas of the paper, *results* and *comparisons*, if available and as appropriate, concluding with *summary* and *potential extensions*.
- Time yourself. If you are given a 30-minute slot for your presentation, plan to finish your talk in 25 to 27 minutes so that there will be three to five minutes for questions. Nothing ruins a talk more than a speaker that runs out of time and cannot present the main ideas of the paper. Running into the next speaker’s time slot is not an option.
- Rehearse your talk multiple times in front of a mirror, favorite pet, family member, friend, or colleague. This will allow you to time yourself (see the previous point) and to familiarize yourself with what you want to say and when you want to say it, so that you will deliver your talk naturally. Speakers that read their own foils as if it is the first time they see them are bound to make a horrible impression.
- Arrive to the site of your presentation ten minutes before your start time, and make sure your laptop can correctly interface with the projector. At many conferences, each session has three or four 30-minute talks; in this case, you should arrive before the beginning of the entire session and introduce yourself to your session chair; often, the session chair will ask the speakers to download their presentations to a single laptop, to reduce the switching time between speakers; again, make sure your presentation works on the laptop-projector combination; of course, you should not leave the session before all the other speakers in the session have delivered their talk. It is a good idea to carry a USB key with your presentation on it, in case your laptop gets stolen, stepped on, rained on, etc.
- During your presentation, make eye contact with the audience. Position your laptop so that its screen faces the audience, and remain oriented toward the audience as much as possible. Nobody wants to stare at the back of your head for long. Of course, you should never point to the laptop screen, but only to the projector screen, using a telescopic or laser pointer; most conferences provide the session chair with a pointer, but it is a good idea to purchase and carry your own, to be safe.
- In large conference venues, you will have to wear or use a microphone, it is pointless to try to avoid this reality, so don’t be shy. If the microphone is a clip-on style, be sure that your clothing (tie, jacket lapel, scarf) does not brush against the microphone head, as the resulting (amplified) noise is extremely distracting.