ASCS – How to Give a Good Research Talk

Steffen Hölldobler
International Center for Computational Logic
Technische Universität Dresden
Germany

► What to say
► Aids
► What to put on a slide
► Giving talks

"Logic is everywhere ..."
This is adapted from

Peyton Jones, Hughes, Launchbury: How to give a good research talk. SIGPLAN Notices 28 (11): 1993

It is based on my own experience
Some Cornerstones

- The speaker
- The subject area
- The audience
- The location
- The technical equipment
- The session chair
What to Say

► “Taster” for your work; rather than an indepth treatment
► Who is my primary audience?
► If someone remembers only one thing from my talk, what would I like to be it?
  ▶ or make it “three things”
► Don’t forget to tell the audience the answer to the last question
Using Examples

- Motivating examples
- Illustrating examples
- Running examples
- Finding good examples is a time-consuming process
- Have I illustrated this idea/theorem/definition/technique/algorithm with an example?
Pruning: Saying Enough without Saying Too Much

- Don’t bore the audience with indepth introductions, basic notions, etc
- Some motivation and introduction is usually sufficient
- Jump right into the problem with a good example
- If you bore an audience in the first few minutes, you may never get them back
- Try a non-uniform approach
  - treat some aspects in more detail than others
Telling it How it is

► Avoid the temptation to conceal a problem
  ▶ it is dishonest
  ▶ it is ineffective
  ▶ a bright audience will find it out

► You might find somebody who makes a suggestion

► Get your audience to help you do your research
Visual and Other Aids

- Beamer, blackboard, handouts, models, etc
- Overlays
- Movies
- What do you want to use?
- For what do you want to use it?
What to Put on a Slide?

- The font must be large enough for everybody in the audience.
- People can read and take in very little information.
  - Six or seven “things” on one slide is enough.
- Slides should emphasize what you want to say.
- You should plan to talk about what’s on your slide.
- Never include trivia such as “introduction” and “conclusion.”
- Allow the audience to re-orient.
- Include signposts.
Giving Talks

► You will be nervous
  ▶ that’s normal
► Make eye contact with the audience
► Respond to the session chair
► The audience should recognize that they are being *talked to* rather than being *talked at*
► Shall you reveal a slide line by line?
► Don’t block the screen or the blackboard
► Pointers are tricky
Timing

- Don’t overrun
- Don’t finish too early
- Test your presentation in all details at home
- Add a control point such that you can adapt your presentation if needed
  - by leaving out slides
  - by showing additional slides