

Tips for Effective Oral Presentations

- When speaking to a diverse audience, remember that you know much more about the topic than they do. Step back and figure out what information a listener needs in order to truly understand your research. Provide adequate background. Avoid using lab “slang” and abbreviations that may not be familiar to everyone. If you do use abbreviations, be sure to define them at first mention.
- Don’t go too fast. Again, remember that everyone is not as expert as you. Go through your data carefully and slowly (almost invariably, the proper pace will seem too slow to you). Take a breath (or two) between slides. Above all, don’t advance to the next slide while you’re still talking about the previous slide. Repeat key points, and include summaries where appropriate.
- Every data slide should tell a story: Why did I do this? How did I do this? What were the results? What do the results mean? It is very helpful to have the title of the slide be the main conclusion. (For example, “*Francisella tularensis* stimulates hepatocytes to secrete CCL5” is more informative than “Effects of *Francisella tularensis* on hepatocytes.”)
- Make sure that you sell the importance of your research to your audience. Tell them explicitly why it is important in the grand scheme of biology. And unless you are almost done with your project, it’s a great idea to include a “Future Aims” slide near the end.
- Don’t cram too much onto one slide. It doesn’t take less time to present six pieces of data on one slide than six slides with one piece of data each – it just makes it frustrating to read.
- Text on slides should highlight major points, not list every word that you are going to say. Don’t read from your slides – it usually results in an unexciting presentation.
- Use the laser pointer wisely. It’s unnecessary to wave it around to indicate bullet points on a text slide. Reserve it for pointing out particular features of photographs or key elements of graphs and tables.
- Practice your talk in advance. Transitions between slides are particularly important. One tip I heard a while ago and still use myself is to print out your PowerPoint in Handout format and write the transitions down. Thinking through the transitions will help the whole presentation flow more smoothly. Also, if you find that you keep forgetting to mention certain key items (e.g., experimental conditions) when practicing, make sure to include them on the slide itself.
- Presentations always are brighter and have more contrast on your computer than they do when projected. Make sure the colors you choose will show up (red on a dark blue background or yellow on a white background does not work well). Also, make sure that the text labels on graphs and figures are big enough to be seen from the back of the room. If in doubt, borrow a projector and do a trial run.
- Remember to acknowledge the source of any images or data other than your own.