How to Make a Great Presentation at the Conference
The Concept of a Conference Talk

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Making a great presentation can be fun and is certainly a challenge!
Here are some ideas about how to get the most attention for your efforts.

1 Presentation layout

1.1 How to arrange presentations.

That is taught everywhere. The website `http://people.engr.ncsu.edu/txie/advice.htm#presentation` [1] contains a lot of links you might find useful.

1.2 Practical matters.

How to use the tools, how to use software, etc: given in most advises. There are many good websites that discuss this matter and many provide good sources[2].

[1] A very good source is http://www.cs.washington.edu/homes/mernst/advice/giving-talk.html .

[2] I advice to my students the following sites (sorry, some of them are in German).

For pictures see
http://www.pixelgalerie.com/
http://www.publicdomainpictures.net/
http://www.sxc.hu/index.phtml
http://freerangestock.com/
http://www.stockvault.net/
http://www.freedigitalphotos.net/
http://www.sxc.hu/
http://www.compfight.com/ (Flickr search machine)

Graphics websites that can be advised are the following ones:
http://qvectors.net/
http://www.vectorvaco.com/
http://all-silhouettes.com/
http://www.webresourcesdepot.com/tag/ai/
http://www.designworkplan.com/signage-symbols/free-vector-arrows.htm

Typography is advised at:
http://typefacts.com/
http://www.typo-info.de/
http://projekt1.fh-bielefeld.de/fb1/tipptipps/tipptipps_index.htm

Fonds are discussed at:
http://www.dafont.com/
http://www.letterheadfonts.com/
http://simplythebest.net/fonts/
http://typenow.net/numbers.htm
http://new.myfonts.com/search/free/fonts/
http://www.fontsforflash.com/
http://www.fontsquirrel.com/ (This toolbox is also commercially available.)

Colours are a real issue in many talks (blue letter on darkblue background):
http://kuler.adobe.com/
http://www.colorotate.org/
http://de-de.colourlovers.com/
http://colorsuckr.com/

See also Lorem ipsum at http://www.loremipsum.de/

There are standards, e.g., the DIN standard http://www.din-formate.de/reihe-a-din-groessen-mm-pixel-dpi.html

2 Storyboarding your presentation

2.1 The presentation background

Decide on who should present.

Once you have the topic, decide on whether you should be the only presenter, or whether you should have a co-presenter. Common co-presenters would be a client or supplier and work very well when you are presenting a case study type of topic where you show how something was done in conjunction with this partner. Co-presenters can provide different perspectives on the same area.

Outline your presentation.

The first step in creating the presentation outline is to determine the goal of your presentation. The goal is what you want the audience to know or do at the end of the presentation. Next, lay out the 4-6 major steps you will take to get your audience from where they are today to the goal of your presentation by the time your presentation ends. This is your presentation outline.

Prepare key benefits to the audience.

Conference organizers are always interested in promoting the benefits to potential attendees. You can help them by preparing a 4-6 bullet point list of how the attendees will benefit from attending your session.

Gather any supporting documentation.

In addition to the session outline, you may have to submit supporting documentation such as your resume or CV (take the time now to update it to include your most recent accomplishments), past conference presentations (date, conference, session title), references, etc.

2.2 Preparing the presentation with consideration of other papers

Some conferences, e.g. FoIKS 2012, provide a service for obtaining papers published in the conference in advance. Most conferences are however based on on-place information about the content of the papers, i.e., participants arrive and have a chance to quickly browse through papers of interest. In such cases, questions to authors are difficult to develop and are based on some very quick impression.

It is a far better idea to know the content of some very few papers of participants interest in advance. Therefore, some papers can be made available on personal and specific demand after contacting the organisers. This help you to prepare a presentation for the conference.

It is not possible to make available the complete proceedings in advance to everybody but papers on request can be send. If participants use this opportunity then they will get a broader audience.

2.3 Kind of storyboards

The storyboard concept has originally been developed in art for movies, performances, etc. and has been applied to web information systems [3]. There are different kinds of presentation stories that can be applied. We mainly distinguish three main storyboard pattern: narrative, investigative, and discovery pattern. Most presentations given in a conference are based on narrative stories. They might be a success but they are difficult to deliver, require an auditory that like the topic and speaker, and must be based on content that is deliverable. Narrative stories are successful if they are given in isolation. If they are given in sessions then attention of the auditory is decreasing with each next narrative story.

The three kinds can be characterised as follows:

For German speaking people there is a good discussion at http://www.stroeer.de/markt_news.1049.0.html?newsid=887 .

[3] see http://www.informatik.uni-kiel.de/ifi/forschung/technische-berichte/bericht/?tx_publication_pi1[single]=119

Narrative or epic story.

Narrative stories tell the paper. They typically follow the rhetoric pattern[4]

Quis, quid, quando, ubi, cur, quem ad modum, quibus adminiculis.
(Who, what, when, where, why, in what way, by what means)

Their story stream is based on the classical drama: introduction, development, conflict, climax, conclusion. The setting, characters and circumstances of the story are succinctly described in the introduction. The characters interact interact with each other and try to find the solution to the problem. The conflict is the central issue of the story. The climax is the moment of high emotion when the character or characters succeed or fail in their attempt to solve the problem. The conclusion finishes the story.

This pattern is used for most of the talks and result in talks that are difficult to deliver.

We have observed a number of *specific implementations of narrative stories*:

Potpourri story.

Better not to use such since they are confusing.

Folktales story.

'Once upon a time ... '[5]

Typical examples are talks that introduce standards.

Joke story.

Jokes follow the plot: orientation on stereotypes, sudden change with surprising outcome.

Jokes are mainly ruled by timing, precision, synthesis, and rhythm.

Advertisement or promotional stories.

Advertisement follows typically the pattern: awareness, adding knowledge, liking the proposal, shaping preferences, conviction, purchase.

In general, the promotion story space is given by: (1) content, i.e., the paper or material behind; (2) medium, to be promoted with, i.e., poster or appetiser presentation; (3) addressed audience of promotional assertion, i.e., the participants of the session with their interests; (4) exterior conditions; and (5) amount and duration.

The descriptive promotional story describes the result behind the presentation. The problem solution story shows the solution of a problem. The presenter story is based on the achievements obtained. The testimonial story describes the satisfaction obtained in other applications. The demonstration story is based on a set of screen plays. Promotional stories use a sequence of sub-stories similar to the following ones: (1) abstract; (2) exposition with an orientation and starting situation; (3) discussion of motivation; (4) goal presentation; (5) complications; (6) surprising solution; (7) coda and consequences; (8) epilogue. The narration is based on functions such as attraction of attention, raising of interest, development of desire, and action.

This pattern can be used for appetiser sessions as well as for product presentations. They are oriented on main main messages and achievements. They either follow a 'product-as-a-hero' or 'demonstration-of-usefulness-of-knowledge' or 'demonstration-of-fiasco-if-not-used' pattern.

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[4] Everybody in Information Systems research knows the Zachman pattern for information systems models. It rephrases the seven 'circumstances' of the rhetor Hermagoras of Temnos (Cicero had a similar concept of circumstances.) that we use here for the rhetoric pattern of narrative conference talks.

[5] Vladimir Propp (1895-1970) (Morphology of the Folk Tale. Reprint by University of Texas Press, Austin (1968)) distinguishes 31 narratemes and four spheres after the initial situation: (1) introduction (absentation, interdiction, ...); (2) body of the story (villainy and lack, mediation, counteraction, departure); (3) donor sequence (search of a method by which the solution may be reached: testing, reaction, acquisition, struggle, ..., resolution); (4) solution. This sequence is very general and may be applied to most of folktales, mystery and other stories.
This allows to specify many stories by specific atomar actions. For instance, the well known fairy tale 'The wild swans' is specified by $ib^1 a^1 c^1 A^1 B^4 C \nearrow \{Sch^1 H^1_{\neg} Z^1_{\neg} \| sch^7 H^7 Z^9\} W^4 L^1 \searrow V^1 [Sch^1 H^1 Z^9 \equiv R^4] \times 3$.

The epic story has long been a favorite of conference presentations. It is easy to see why it is so popular. The most common mode of interaction in presentations is through the keyboard or through mouses. The range of actions that can be symbolically performed in real time through these controls is limited to the physical kind.

Investigative or dramatic story.

Investigative stories use the simple pattern: introduction, crime or mystery, investigation, solution to the mystery, and finally the arrest of the criminals. This pattern can be applied also to presentations as well as to any communication act. One of the main conventions from the original detective story is causality, which provides for the reader a sense that later events occurred as a result of earlier ones.

In an investigation plot, the action is mental rather than physical: most of the events consist of acts of verbal communication between the characters; and when the characters perform physical actions, the significance of these actions resides in what they reveal about the mind of the agent and in how they affect interpersonal relations. Another difference from epic plots is that dramatic narratives present a closed pattern of exposition, complication, crisis and resolution (also known as the Freytag triangle) that defies expansion. The focus on interpersonal relations of the dramatic plot describes both the tragic and the comic genre.

This pattern is the basis of most *entertaining* talks. They might be as entertaining as best movies.

Performance-based presentations: The best implementation is based on plays that involve several people. The presentation can be given by two or more people. Another approach is based on involvement of people from the auditory.

The dramatic story is the most difficult to implement because of its emphasis on the evolution of problem solution. In a dramatic talk elements are evolving and are constantly redefined. The results obtained so far are reevaluated after they have been used. The trademark of the dramatic story lies in its ability to create an emotional type of immersion.

Epistemic or discovery or detective story.

Epistemic stories are driven by the desire to know. Therefore, listeners (and readers) need first to understand what is the problem to be considered. Listeners are curious about the problem solution.

This pattern is the basis of most *successful* talks. It follows the storyline of epistemic plots. The trademark of the epistemic plot is the superposition of two stories: one constituted by the events that took place in the past, and the other by the investigation that leads to their discovery. The intellectual appeal of the discovery story lies in challenging the reader to find the solution before it is given out by the narrative; in order to do so, the reader needs to sort out the clues from the accidental facts, and to submit these clues to logical operations of deduction and induction.

The desire to know that drives the epistemic story situates the immersivity of the genre on the temporal level. Temporal immersion includes three narrative effects: curiosity, surprise and suspense. The first two dominate the mystery story, while the third is more typical of thrillers. When participation takes the form of spatial exploration and leads to unexpected discoveries, its motivation is curiosity, and its reward is surprise. Suspense however is much more resistant to interactivity, because it requires a long-range planning by the system and a top-down management of the attendees expectations. Like epistemic curiosity, suspense is created by an intense desire to know, but while epistemic curiosity concerns events that already happened, suspense is focused on the future. People experience suspense when they can foresee two or more possible developments, and they are dying to find out which one of these paths the story will actualize.

In the goal-oriented action based epistemic plots, knowledge elements mostly matter to the content because of their capacity to help or hinder the achievement of tasks. The talk remains focused on the elucidation of the problem until a solution has been found.

2.4 Presentations benefit from interaction

The attendee is invited to step into the world of your topic, to impersonate a character, and to interact through language and gestures with the presenter. No matter what the user says or does, the presenter responds coherently, and integrates the users input into a narrative arc that sustains interest.

The ingredients of interactive stories are:

- Integration of user actions within the story of the presentation. Just as, in real life, all of our actions contribute to our presentation story all of the users actions should move the plot forward. This means that these actions should be more than a mean to unlock the next episode in a story told primarily through slides and other non-interactive media. There should be a close thematic relation between the tasks offered to the user and the plot of the story.
- Frequent interaction. In real life, we interact with people and the world on a fairly constant basis, though there are moments when we are stripped of agency and forced to watch as spectators the events that determine our destiny. To reproduce this aspect of life, interactive stories should make interactive moments the rule and passive moments the exception, rather than limiting agency to a few decision points separated by long stretches of passive watching.
- Dynamic creation of the story. Though interactive story will always rely on pre-scripted elements, the plot should be created as much as possible in the real-time of the users interaction with the system. A reasonable number of different variations should emerge from different interactions.

Interactive stories are creating a narrative immersion, i.e., an engagement of the imagination in the mental construction and contemplation of a presentation story. Narrative immersion can take at least three forms: spatial (a sense of place and pleasure taken in exploring the storyworld), temporal (a burning desire to know what will happen next) and emotional (affective reactions to the story and to the characters) .

2.5 Things to think about

Oral communication is different from written communication

Listeners have one chance to hear your talk and can't "re-read" when they get confused. In many situations, they have or will hear several talks on the same day. Being clear is particularly important if the audience can't ask questions during the talk. There are two well-know ways to communicate your points effectively. The first is to K.I.S.S. (keep it simple stupid). Focus on getting one to three key points across. Think about how much you remember from a talk last week. Second, repeat key insights: tell them what you're going to tell them (Forecast), tell them, and tell them what you told them (Summary).

Think about your audience

Most audiences should be addressed in layers: some are experts in your sub-area, some are experts in the general area, and others know little or nothing. Who is most important to you? Can you still leave others with something? For example, pitch the body to experts, but make the forecast and summary accessible to all.

Think about your rhetorical goals

For conference talks, for example, I recommend two rhetorical goals: leave your audience with a clear picture of the gist of your contribution, and make them want to read your paper. Your presentation should not replace your paper, but rather whet the audience appetite for it. Thus, it is commonly useful to allude to information in the paper that can't be covered adequately in the presentation. Below I consider goals for academic interview talks and class presentations.

2.6 Presentations followed by response

FoIKS wants to stimulate intensive discussion on all papers given at FoIKS and turn the conference into a real workshop. The results should be an intensive discussion during the conference and a good starting point for future collaboration.

To achieve this we organise sessions in a different way by asking participants to act as RESPONDERS. The role of a responder is twofold: (a) you act as a session chair for this paper and thus guide discussion; (b) you read the paper in advance and share in a fiive-to-ten minutes own presnetation your thought on the paper and potential relationships with your own research.

Since FoIKS also aims at integration of two communities we asks also for response if you are not in the area of research of the paper. This allows to associate the paper with the other research community.

Responder-based discussion typically increases the potential impact of each paper. It results in a more intensive discussion on the paper. A responder is assigned to each of the presentations in advance. The responder is going to act as a discussion leader. The responder gets the paper in advance and is ask to lead the discussion for the paper. Responders may contact authors before. They should read the papers before the event and should give a good number of questions, remarks, suggestions for the paper. The responder approach has already been used by number of conferences and has led to a good cooperation among participants. It has also led to a better understanding of the topic of the paper since many responders have given their view on the paper and its area. Finally, the discussion is opened for all participants where the responder acts as a discussion leader.

The advantage of such session organisation is obvious. It is however not practised in most conferences[6]. Authors are not only delivering a paper waiting that at the end one or two random questions are given by somebody, may be by the session chair. The authors do not get any response in such cases and will later not cited or they results will not be used anymore. Responders change this situation. They also provide another viewpoint to the paper and often add another application area to the given one. Responders may be experts in the area of the talk, they could also be experts in another area and thus bring another view to the paper.

Our experience is that the responder mode leads to an agile and more lively discussion, which is what we expect from a workshop, a symposium or a conference. Additionally, it also eases session chairing.

2.7 A generic narrative conference talk storyboard

This storyboard is a starting point, not a rigid template. Most good speakers average two minutes per slide (not counting title and outline slides), and thus use about a dozen slides for a twenty minute presentation.

- Title/author/affiliation (1 slide)
- Forecast (1 slide)
  Give gist of problem attacked and insight found (What is the one idea you want people to leave with? This is the “abstract” of an oral presentation.)
- Outline (1 slide)
  Give talk structure. Some speakers prefer to put this at the bottom of their title slide. (Audiences like predictability.)
- Background
  - Motivation and Problem Statement (1-2 slides)
    (Why should anyone care? Most researchers overestimate how much the audience knows about the problem they are attacking.)
  - Related Work (0-1 slides)
    Cover superficially or omit; refer people to your paper.
  - Methods (1 slide)
    Cover quickly in short talks; refer people to your paper.

  This part allows the listener to understand the area. Therefore, it must be adapted to the knowledge of the average auditory.

[6] An exception are the FoIKS symposia and some workshops we have organised.

- Results (4-6 slides)
  Present key results and key insights. This is main body of the talk. Its internal structure varies greatly as a function of the researcher's contribution. (Do not superficially cover all results; cover key result well. Do not just present numbers; interpret them to give insights. Do not put up large tables of numbers.)

- Summary (1 slide)

- Future Work (0-1 slides) Optionally give problems this research opens up.

- Thank you slide

- Backup Slides (0-3 slides)
  Optionally have a few slides ready (not counted in your talk total) to answer expected questions. (Likely question areas: ideas glossed over, shortcomings of methods or results, and future work.)

Epic narratives focus on physical actions, and the content relations that motivate the presenter to act remain fairly simple. Since every feat adds to the glory of the paper, the story can be endlessly expanded by adding new feats and new episodes.

2.8 Promotional talks

A typical application of a promotional talk is the appetiser presentation for a poster. The appetiser session allows each participant to capture the message, the achievements and the area of your poster. Each listener to such talk should be able to know what to discuss with the author(s) after the appetiser.

The appetiser might be structured by:

- Slide 1: title, name, affiliation, email
  main message of your presentation
  for 1 minute

- Slide 2: achievements reached so far
  why somebody should visit your poster
  for 2 minutes

- Slide 3: interest in topic and discussion at poster stand,
  your discussion proposal for visitors at your poster stand
  for 2 minutes

2.9 The background for detective conference talk storyboard

This part is going to be finished in the next version.

Detective stories are the best conference pattern. They are difficult to develop but best fitted for any auditory. Attendees will remember it, understood it and will use your points.

- Know what your point is.

  I attended many presentations that were well-spoken and well timed but never actually made a point.

Detective and dramatic narratives present a closed pattern of exposition, complication, crisis and resolution (also known as the Freytag triangle) that defies expansion. They focus on evolving networks of content relations.

Example-based story:

2.10 The background for epistemic conference talk storyboard

This part is going to be finished in the next version.

The desire to know that drives this plot situates the immersivity of the genre on the temporal level. Temporal immersion includes three narrative effects: curiosity, surprise and suspense. When participation takes the form of spatial exploration and leads to unexpected discoveries, its motivation is curiosity, and its reward is surprise. Suspense however is much more resistant to interactivity, because it requires a long-range planning by the system and a top-down management of the listeners expectations. Like epistemic curiosity, suspense is created by an intense desire to know, but while epistemic curiosity concerns events that already happened, suspense is focused on the future. People experience suspense when they can foresee two or more possible developments, and they are dying to find out which one of these paths the story will actualize.

Problem-driven story:

3 2 Weeks Prior to Your Conference Leave

Prepare your presentation slides.

Make sure that the slides enhance your message, not detract from it. Use high contrast colors to enhance readability, bullet points to allow you to enhance each point with your message and graphics that bring the points to life. Avoid the flashy graphics and sound that distract from your message.

Prepare your introduction.

The first few minutes of your session will be the most important and you do not want to get off to a bad start with an introduction that is poorly written or stumbled through. You should write your own introduction that is easy for someone else to read and runs no longer than 60 seconds. Include what the attendees will gain from the session, why your topic is important to them and then some of your qualifications to establish why they should listen to you on this topic. Print the introduction double spaced in at least 14-18 point font size. Take two copies with you, one to give to the person who is doing the introduction and one as a backup.

Practice.

At this point, your presentation has pretty much been finalized and you need to start practicing. If possible, practice with the presentation slides so you get used to how the points will come up and how you need to interact with the equipment to make it work properly. There is sometimes benefit to practicing in a larger room (if you have one available to you) so you get the feel for standing up in front of a large group.

Test your presentation slides.

Test that the slides against the detailed outline to make sure it is consistent, check the spelling and accuracy of all facts and test that all animations, transitions and multimedia effects work as intended.

Some of the best preparation away from the conference is in front of a mirror, friends, or family. Initially, practice in front of the mirror. Practice creates a comfort found with familiarity. Remember that familiarity tends to breed success. Second, practice in front of friends and family, thereby obtaining information about staying within time constraints (25 minutes for most conferences, with 3 minutes for questions), quality speaking (i.e., speaking slowly, clearly, and with enough volume), and answering questions from the audience. Third, take questions and criticism as an opportunity for improvement.

And other optional steps:

Review your outline.

Review your original presentation outline that you prepared for the session submission.

Finalize your outline.

Review and agree on the presentation outline, including the presentation goal and key points you will make.

Analyze audience.

Analyze who will be in attendance at the conference, with an eye on what their level of expertise is with your topic, their current attitude towards your intended message and your level of credibility with the attendees.

Prepared detailed outline.

Prepare a detailed outline that breaks down each key point into sub-points and backs them up with expert opinions, facts, statistics, stories, examples or analogies.

Test your outline.

Run through the detailed outline to make sure it fits the time you have been given and it is directed to reaching the presentation goal.

Prepare your handout.

A handout is a good idea for conference presentations because it allows the attendees to take your message back to their job site where they will have more time to digest it. You can prepare a simple copy of your slides or something more complex.

Submit required files.

If you have a chance to submit your presentation slides and handout to the conference organizer, make sure it has been submitted by the deadline.

4 Before Leaving for the Conference

Backup.

Before you pack, make sure you back up all of your key files onto CD-ROM or memory stick or to a web-based backup site. You need to know that your files are safe in case disaster strikes your equipment.

Pack.

In addition to your clothes of course, you need to pack all of the technology you need to make the presentation. Make sure you pack all the cables you require, all discs or other media, all your equipment, notes and backups.

5 At the Conference

Check the room.

As soon as you can, check the room that you are speaking in. Review the room setup, the size and what other sessions will be taking place close to your room since noise interference is a real issue in many conferences. Do not be surprised if the room setup is different than what the conference organizer said it would be or what you had asked for. Many times circumstances dictate changes beyond their control. Just relax and determine how you will work with what you have.

Attend other sessions.

It is important to attend some sessions before yours when you are at the conference. Especially if there is an opening keynote presentation. The purpose is so that you do not duplicate material that others have already presented and you can tie your material into some of what the attendees have already heard. This shows an advanced desire to make your session useful to the attendees.

How you ever seen ill-behaved attendees in conferences that exclusively attended their own sessions, read and answer in the sessions their emails, left after their talks and thus did not make any contribution beside their talks to the conference. This behaviour is the best way not to leave any memories about your research, to be considered uppish and have misused your and others time and attention.

Instead, compare in the sessions you can attend the approaches and ideas presented with your research and knowledge, eagerly ask questions in the session and after the session, discuss your observations with others after the sessions, and find comrades for the next papers and talks.

6 10 Minutes Before Your Session

Introduce you to the session chair.

Many times you will not meet the person who is introducing you until right before your session. They may have written an introduction for you or more likely they will be prepared to read whatever was printed in the conference brochure as your introduction. Thank them for being the introducer and hand them the introduction that you wrote. Make sure they know how to properly pronounce your name.

Test the equipment and upload your introduction to the equipment in the room.

Most of have already seen in conferences how presenters have been fighting with their equipment. They plugged in their computers to the environment; then realised that it does not work; next restarted their computer; next started the program and realised that fonts etc. are not properly shown; next recompiled the presentation; next ...; ... and finally ask for an extension of their presentation time.

Instead you should load your presentation before the session start to the equipment and check it in advance whether it works.

If you are bound to your computer then test the audio and visual equipment in advance: plug your laptop and presentation equipment in and see what it looks like. Does the room lighting wash out your display? If so, ask for lights to be turned down or some lights to be turned off. Check the microphone level and quality.

Relax.

If you have followed the steps up to this point, you should be able to relax because you are well prepared for your presentation. Enjoy the session knowing that you have prepared well and the attendees will get great value from your presentation.

7 After the Presentation

Make note of questions asked.

Most conference sessions include a few minutes of questions at the end of the session where attendees can probe deeper into specific areas. Take note of what questions you were asked. This is great material for another conference session idea since it is clear that people want to know more about those areas.

Do follow-ups.

If you have promised to follow up with someone who attended your session with more information or an answer to a more complex question, get their contact information and do the follow up. So many presenters never follow up, so you will stand out when you do contact them with the information or answer they were looking for.

Make information available.

It can be a good idea to post additional information after the session on your web site for attendees to refer to. If there is a paper, report, diagram, reference list, web links or some other information that a number of people had asked for in the session, tell people where they can go to get the information and make sure you post it to your web site soon after the presentation.