

TIPS ON PREPARING A TALK

by

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(with minor changes by the Leibniz Institute for Zoo and Wildlife Research, Berlin, Germany)

Many things go into preparing an effective presentation to a group of colleagues. While we've all heard many talks and most of us could identify some talks that could be improved, it is remarkable how the same mistakes get made time and again. This paper is intended to assist you in preparing and delivering a brief presentation at the American Association of Zoo Veterinarians' annual meeting.

The Basics

Oral presentations at the Zoo and Wildlife Health Conference are typically only 13 minutes in length - that's not much time! Using the analogy of a written paper, these are brief communications, not full or review articles. You cannot convey all the information you have or know about a subject in one of these presentations. As a result, the most difficult task for most speakers is deciding what not to include.

Some ideas on the basic format and content:

1. **Do** remember that good speakers/teachers always: 1) Tell the audience what they are going to tell them; 2) Tell it to them; and 3) then repeat what they have just told them. Most listeners will only take away one point from any presentation- your job is to identify the point you want them to remember and convey it effectively.
2. **Don't** adhere strictly to an Introduction, Materials and Methods, etc., format. A narrative or story engages the listener much better.
3. **Do** explain why you did the study you are presenting, or why you think this presentation is important. Briefly, give the audience your 'justification' for the talk.
4. **Don't** spend time explaining things the audience probably knows. Don't spend precious minutes of your presentation reviewing basic information about the species, the pathogen, or the disease. The audience is almost entirely zoo veterinarians or veterinary students, assume they have heard of tigers and their endangered status, *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*, and Johnes' disease, etc., already.
5. **Don't** go into laborious detail on methodologies. Most of the audiences are clinicians and they assume you, or whoever performed the analyses, knew what they were doing. When it comes to descriptions of molecular techniques or statistical analyses, keep them short.
6. **Do** be prepared to answer questions about all aspects, including analytical details and statistics, during the Questions period at the end of the session.
7. **Don't** list your references at the end of your presentation. Most people can't read them either because of the font (see below) or amount of time they are projected.
8. **Do** practice your talk both for content and length

The PowerPoint™ Program

Everyone has seen PowerPoint™ presentation mistakes. Try to remember those things you've seen 'done wrong' and try not to repeat them.

Some PowerPoint™ basics:

1. Keep the number of slides to 2-4 slides/minute presentation

- If you have 50 slides for an 8 minute talk, you are trying to say too much.
- If you are projecting more than 3 slides/minute, you are probably not giving your audience enough time to absorb the material on the slide, or you are using the slide inefficiently.
- Have your slides proof read

2. Keep your fonts large

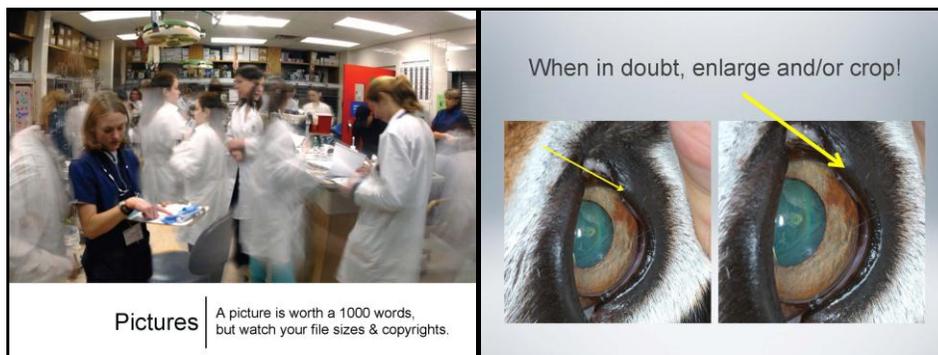
- Try to limit the words to 15- 20 words per slide

b. Use 30p fonts or larger

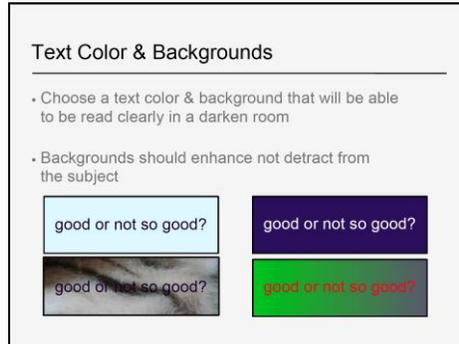
- Use bullet points to highlight key words and concepts
- Avoid text, i.e., don't write out full sentences

3. Keep your images and figures large

- Allow them to fill the entire slide, where appropriate
 - Don't just limit them to the area indicated by the template
 - Crop out unnecessary parts of each image
- Do give credit for photos and figures
- Don't project an unclear image
 - If you have to apologize for the image, DON'T PROJECT IT**
- Don't project lengthy, small print tables
- Avoid tiny thumbnails in the corner of a slide- often people in the back of the room have no idea what they are
- Use arrows to help the audience orient to the figure



4. **Use multiple simple slides**, rather than one complex one, for a lengthy subject.
5. **Don't** use slides devoted to one word, such as "Introduction," "Results," or "Questions."
6. **Avoid embedding videos unless absolutely necessary**
 - a. Realize your video may not transfer properly from your computer to the projector computer at the meeting
 - b. If you need a video clip, pre-test it on the equipment, before the talk



7. PowerPoint™ Options

- a. Find a good, simple template and use it
- b. Dark background are typically most effective
- c. **Avoid using RED LETTERING**
- d. Do not combine RED and GREEN lettering/backgrounds – colorblind members of the audience will miss out!

At the podium

Some suggestions:

1. **Test** the microphone and pointer before your session. If you tend to walk around during the talk, use a lapel microphone.
2. **Don't** rush and remember to breathe. If you have an appropriate amount of material and practiced your presentation, you don't need to hurry and your presentation will be clearer.
3. **Do** vary your voice intensity, to emphasize important points.
4. **Don't** read a lengthy list of authors' names. If the names are projected on a title slide, let the audience read them. If you need to point out one or two important contributors, that's OK.
5. **Don't** read an extensive list of acknowledgements. One or two non-authors and the funding agency are plenty to acknowledge.

And remember: **You are the speaker**, the important one.

- Digital slides are a wonderful tool, but just a tool all the same.
- Slides should only be cue cards, supporting you.

The above are suggestions, not laws. Each person has a different style and each presentation a different purpose, so adapt these ideas as needed.

Acknowledgement: We'd like to thank Dr. Murray Fowler for his previous paper of delivering an effective presentation. It has helped many of us over the years.