

## HOW TO PRESENT A PAPER

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Quotations from "East Coker" by T. S. Eliot.

"So here I am...

Trying to learn to use words, and every attempt  
Is a wholly new start, and a different kind of failure  
Because one has only learnt to get the better of words  
For the thing one no longer has to say, or the way in which  
One is no longer disposed to say it."

### 1. WHAT TO SAY

- Don't give your paper; the audience can't take it. If someone can understand in thirty minutes what it took you weeks to develop, then you're in the wrong business.
- Do advertise your paper. The purpose of an automobile ad is to get potential customers to the showroom, not to give technical specifications. The purpose of your talk is to get people who might be interested in your work to read the paper, not to save them the trouble of reading it.
- Giving a good presentation is an art, requiring both practice and talent. No rules can turn you into an artist, but the following suggestions might be helpful.
  1. Describe simple examples rather than general results. Try to make the examples much too simple -- you will not succeed.
  2. Don't use formalism. If your results cannot be described simply and informally, then there is no reason why anyone should be interested in them.
  3. It is better to be inaccurate than incomprehensible. The place for accuracy is in the paper. (However, false advertising is unethical.)

### 2. HOW TO SAY IT

- Slides are effective. Here are some suggestions for their proper use.
  1. Don't put too much on a slide -- a picture of a thousand words is worthless. For 8 x 11 slides, all letters should be at least 3/8 inch high, with plenty of blank space. People in the back row have to read them too.

2. Slides should be neat and legible. The listener isn't your secretary; it's not his job to decipher your handwriting.
  3. A rapid sequence of slides has a hypnotic effect. Unless you are a licensed hypnotist, don't use more than one slide per minute.
- Time your talk. Running over your allotted time is a mark of incompetence, and displaying your incompetence is a poor way to get someone to read your paper. Remember that talking to an audience takes longer than talking to a mirror.

### 3. DA CAPO

- You are now thinking: "All those dull speakers I've listened to should use these rules, but I don't need them because my talks are interesting." All those dull speakers are now thinking exactly the same thing. Read the rules again with the proper humility. They apply to everyone.

"The only wisdom we can hope to acquire  
Is the wisdom of humility: humility is endless."

### 4. CODA - For Session Chairmen

- Be utterly ruthless about enforcing time limits. Warn the speaker when he has 10 minutes left and when he has 5 minutes left, and stop him in midsentence when his time is up. The audience will be grateful. (A loud alarm clock works quite well if you don't turn it off until the speaker has finished talking.)
- Protect the speaker and the audience from inappropriate questions. Questions should be allowed during the talk only if the audience is small and the question is a simple request for clarification. After the talk, you must be prepared to silence the following two kinds of questioner.
1. One who leads the speaker into a long discussion of an obscure detail which is of no interest to most of the audience.
  2. One who monopolizes the time arguing with the speaker over unresolvable philosophical issues.

Remember that silencing one person enables the rest of the audience to ask questions.