

ASTR 500 - Spring 2010

Tips for Successful Presentations

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These suggestions are some of my own thoughts regarding how to give a successful class presentation. They are based on my own experiences as both a speaker and an audience member in classrooms, colloquia, seminars, professional conferences, etc.

1. Stay on time. There is nothing that irritates an audience more than a speaker who runs over his/her allotted time. Similarly, do not fall too short of your allotted time; that leaves the audience wondering what you left out. If this means actually rehearsing your talk before you give it so that it is timed appropriately, DO SO!
2. Define technical jargon. It's OK to use technical language, especially in this class, but be sure to define new terms the first time you use them.
3. Keep it neat. I don't care if you're using Powerpoint, StarOffice, Keynote, HTML, or PDF slides. As long as they are neat, easy to read, and pleasing to the eye, that's fine.
4. Avoid excessive bling. Too much "jazz" in a presentation (e.g. fancy slide transitions with sounds and funky graphics) detracts from your actual talk, as viewers are forced to process the bling. Excessive use of these features screams "I really have nothing important to tell you!"
5. Limit, or eliminate, your use of tables. Your audience won't know what to do with many columns of numbers unless you carefully lead them through it, which takes time. If you need to include tables to prove a point, make them LARGE and EASY TO READ.
6. Have pity on our eyes. Use a font large enough that a person in the back of the room can read your slides comfortably.
7. Use common sense for figures. Make them large enough to be viewed by all, make the lines heavy enough to see, LABEL YOUR AXES and make the labels large enough to read.
8. Be yourself! It's OK (even encouraged!) to let your own personality come through when giving a class talk. Don't try to be super-funny if that's normally not your style. However, your talk should contain some level of professionalism, even if you are normally a stand-up comedian.