How to give a talk

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People who say "no pun intended" are cowards. Intend your puns, weaklings.
How to do a thing

Intend  Learn

Plan  Practice
Establish intent

What do you want? Something about the audience, not just you:

- convey an idea? teach a skill? prove a proposition? change a preconception?
- get people to read your paper or use your software?
- join a community of scholars? get a job? impress people in power?
- forestall interaction? cover ass? avoid questions? feel superior?
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Pick one idea 😞 Resist thesis creep 🤚
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procedure
contains
step

statement
uses
step
concept
concept
instance

How to exit freeway like a boss (2013)
Develop plan

Collect **techniques** that suit you. What can you do? (Try my advice.)

**constraints** that spur you. What can you not do? (Who needs animation.)

**products** that inspire you. What do others do? (Highlight reels hide work.)
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Start early and gentle. Enjoy the journey.
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Practice script

Practice as soon as possible, as seriously as possible

- Rehearsing even just one slide makes the rest of your plan concrete
- Rehearse entire talk (especially (each) beginning), record yourself, and listen
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Alternate focus between intent (connection) and script (technique)
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Alternate focus between intent (connection) and script (technique)

Intent (connection)
- Stay in present
- Engage audience
- Manage time
- Fix equipment

Script (technique)
- Free up mental capacity
- Etch track in mind (“muscle memory”)
- Practice
- Plan

Stay in present
Practice script

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Intent (connection)  
Script (technique)

Stay in present

Etch track in mind ("muscle memory")

Fado (1910)

One Cut of the Dead (2017)

"Don't stop the camera!"
Learn from experience

Intent is not magic
- What worked? What didn’t? How do you find out?
- What will you change, to increase efficacy and reduce collateral damage?

Who do you want to please?
- Are you kissing up?
- Are you punching up?

If you care, solicit negative feedback in the face of politeness
- “What are you most confused about?”
- “When did you tune out?”
- “Thanks! I’ll trust your compliment more when you tell me what sucked.”
- Shut up and listen
How to give a talk

Intend

Plan

Practice

Learn
How to give a talk

Establish intent
- Build trust
- Grow outline

Develop plan
- Track nodes
- Track edges
- Handle diversity

Learn from experience
- Give a practice talk

Practice script
- Work with audience
- Speak in session

Learn from experience
- Give a practice talk
Build trust to cooperate with audience

Declare your intent up front:

- “I’m here to recruit you to do two things.”
- “This is joint work with X and Y, but I’m the one on the job market this year.”
- “At the end of your handout is a question menu, or you can ask your own.”
- “I can’t take any questions because I have 60 slides and 10 minutes.”

I will tune out if you lose my trust because I see you bullshit or punch down.

*I can’t believe what you say, because I see what you do* (1964)
Grow outline of intents

Means-ends hierarchy

Refactor!

- Prune unused content
- Unify similar content
  - design a running example
  - Inline uncommonly used content
  - Introduce commonly used content
    - (only) by example, not just formally
  - Rename in context

\[ x_1, x_2 \rightarrow x, y \rightarrow \text{src}, \text{dst} \]
Grow outline of intents

Means-ends hierarchy + **linear traversal**
- prefix (up front)
- infix (opening gambit/in medias res/partial-particular-general-particular/recall plan)
- postfix (conclusion)

Design a running example
- Inline uncommonly used content
- Expand notation away
- Introduce commonly used content
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Track outline nodes

Stay on point! A node is an intent, like to convey X, seldom just to talk about X. Tell the audience what you want them to notice in each talk/section/slide/plot.

How to point at a topic

- Projected is good on multiple mirrored screens
- Body is good for commanding attention
- Stick is ok if you can’t reach
- Laser can be hard to see

- Your computer screen is invisible to everyone else

Steady

- Pointer movement
- Keep content to digest, across slide changes or on handout

Speech in synchrony

- Slow down (enjoy speaking it)
- Loud and clear, or quiet and suspenseful
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Track outline edges

For example
More generally
In part
Overall
Because
Therefore
To this end
Now we can
And then
But first

Similarly
In contrast
Moreover
However

Specify the relationship at each move
Track outline edges

For example
More generally
In part
Overall
Because
Therefore
To this end
Now we can
And then
But first

Specify the relationship at each move

Display
- Show the diagrams in your mind or on your whiteboard:
  - a compiler pipeline
  - a proof tree
  - a dependency graph
  - a system architecture
  - not just a bullet list or formula
- Indicate similarities with consistent shapes and positioning

Speech
- Disambiguate with radio intonation
- Speak complete utterances
  - not trailing off
  - not distracted by slide change
Handle diversity

Not everyone knows/cares.

Identify broad themes in common → Remind yourself that your work is great

Multiple modalities.

Interaction.
Work with audience

Voice coach says:

Stand up straight and breathe.

Remember, it’s about them.

More ways to respond to questions:

- Say it again for folks in the back
- Rephrase the question to make it make sense before answering it
- “I didn’t get the question”
- “I don’t have an answer”
- “Let’s chat afterwards”
Speak in a conference session

Introduce yourself to session chair
  ▶ name pronunciation
  ▶ pronouns
  ▶ bio?
  ▶ **disambiguate time signals**

Check A/V before session
  ▶ text & color legible
  ▶ voice & sound audible (mic distance?)
  ▶ laser pointer visible
  ▶ remote control reachable
  ▶ wireless mic wearable
  ▶ interpreter visible and audible
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Listen to other talks in the session
- don’t fiddle with your slides

Stay on time
- acknowledge time signals
- don’t say “I’m going to skip this slide except to say 😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞�”
- last resort: switch to last slide and stop

End clearly
- **summarize on last slide**
- speak “thank you” for applause
- hang out after session
Give a practice talk

Explain before:
- Talk venue
- Audience to simulate
- Desired feedback

Collect during:
- Timing (per slide?)
- Instant feedback (in side channel)

Rehearsal includes audience questions.

Discuss after:
- Junior folks give feedback first, because
  They are usually the intended audience
  They should learn constructive criticism
  They can pick off low-hanging fruit first
- One piece of feedback per person, because
  🕒 Pick one idea 😞 Resist thesis creep

Focus on problem identified by feedback before solution suggested
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▶ Build trust
▶ Grow outline

Develop plan
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▶ Track edges
▶ Handle diversity

Learn from experience
▶ Give a practice talk

Practice script
▶ Work with audience
▶ Speak in session
“Honesty.”

—Patrick Blackburn

“Performance is actually one of the only spaces we can be honest anymore.”

—Alok Vaid-Menon

“People are going to look. Give them something to look at.”

—Jefferson Tugger