Computer Science 690A:
Research Methods in Computer Science I

Giving Talks for Fun and Enlightenment

GIVING GOOD (AND BAD) TALKS

FINDING THE STORY

LAYING OUT THE STORY

TELLING THE STORY

Giving a Good Talk (The Short Version)

- Tell a story.
- Tell it well.
- Tell it enthusiastically.

. . . Details follow . . .

Giving a Good Talk (Slightly Longer Version)

- Respect Your Story

    - Make your story the right length.
    - Use the right level of detail.
    - Highlight the right bits of the story.

- Respect Your Audience

    - Don't make people feel stupid.
    - Don't go over your allotted time.
    - Make people want to know more.

Finding the Story

- Story = narrative thread + details.
- Isolate the key narrative thread by giving a 30 second version of your talk.
  - This will force you to isolate the important bits of your talk and establish the key logical relations between these bits.
  - To find the sub-stories associated with these isolated bits, apply this 30-second technique recursively.
- Once you have the narrative thread(s), you can add details back in to flesh out the story as necessary.

  . . . But how much detail? And for which parts? . . .

Laying Out the Story:
The Structure of Academic Talks

- Core structure:
  - Introduction (Why is your work important?)
  - Background (What's needed to understand what you did?)
  - Methods (What did you do?)
  - Results (How did it turn out?)
  - Discussion (What does it mean?)
  - Conclusions and Future Work (What's next?)

> "TELL 'EM WHAT YOU'RE GONNA TELL 'EM,
> TELL' EM,
> TELL' EM WHAT YOU TOLD 'EM."

Laying Out the Story: Accommodating Audience and Allotted Time

Talk Duration	Audience			
	Non-specialist		Specialist	
Short (15–25m)	***	Introduction	*	Introduction
	**	Back. / Methods	**	Back. / Methods
	*	Results	***	Results
	**	Discussion	**	Discussion
	*	Conc. / Future	**	Conc. / Future
	*	*Guidance*	*	*Guidance*
Long (40-50m)	***	Introduction	**	Introduction
	**	Back. / Methods	***	Back. / Methods
	**	Results	***	Results
	***	Discussion	**	Discussion
	**	Conc. / Future	**	Conc. / Future
	***	*Guidance*	**	*Guidance*

Laying Out the Story:
Allocating Talk "Real Estate"

- Once you know the relative importance of each part of your talk, assign time for each part accordingly.

  - If using slides, assign # slides for each part and then do breakdown on text / diagrams for these slides (suggest $2\frac{1}{2}$ minutes per slide initially and then adjust).
  - If using board, assign what can reasonably be written / drawn on board for each part.

- **Always include segues at talk-part transitions, either as slides or verbally (*e.g.*, relate back to original questions motivating talk-parts).**

Telling the Story

- Do what you need to be comfortable giving your talk
  - Practice your talk beforehand (by yourself and/or in front of others).
  - Use written notes (but try not to just read from them).
- Always bring your own talk timer, *e.g.*, watch.
- View your talk as a one-on-one chat with your audience members about something new (to them) and fascinating.
- View your talk as an advertisement for your work – you can't say everything in the talk, and you shouldn't try to.
- However familiar you are with your talk-topic, always try to be enthusiastic ("If you can't be with the one you love, love the one you're with" (Stephen Stills)).

Giving a Good Talk: Some Final Thoughts

The role of the critic is to help people see what is in the work, what is in it that shouldn't be, what is not in it that could be. He is a good critic if he helps people understand more about the work than they could see for themselves; he is a great critic, if by his understanding and feeling for the work, by his passion, he can excite people so that they want to experience more of the art that is there, waiting to be seized . . . He is a bad critic if he does not awaken the curiosity, enlarge the interests and understanding of his audience.
The art of the critic is to transmit his knowledge of and enthusiasm for art to others.

— Pauline Kael (1919–2001)