Pointers on Presentations

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A fantastic resource.

- Read Dr. Vander Zanden's advice on giving effective research presentations:
- [http://web.eecs.utk.edu/~bvz/presentation.html](http://web.eecs.utk.edu/~bvz/presentation.html)
BVZ's Advice.

• Average adult attention span is 20 minutes.
  – Check out what your audience is doing in 20 minutes.
  – Give them a mental break.

• The Four Golden Questions of a research talk:
  – Where are we now?
  – Where are we going?
  – How did we get there?
  – What is left for the future?
• If you change topics, provide a summary and a break.

• Introduce concrete examples before formalism
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• With software, do a demo before explaining the details.
• Dr. Vander Zanden says that "sans-serif" fonts are better than not.

• I don't agree. I'm fine with Times-Roman.

• However, some fonts really suck. Stick with the normal ones like Times-Roman, Helvetica or Arial. Don’t use this font.

• And changing colors for no good reason is distracting.
BVZ's Advice.

- Limit your bullets per slide to 5 or 6.
- Make your bullets short and snappy.
  - People read all of your slides before they start to listen to you.
- Do not use complete sentences unless they are pithy.
- Do not clutter your background.
- Put a header on every slide with a title.
BVZ's Advice.

- A picture is worth 1000 words.
- Screen snapshots and code listings are useless.
- Special effects are typically distracting.
BVZ's Advice: During the Presentation

- You are your own worst critic.
- Do not read your slides.
  - Shockingly, it's harder to read your slides when your bullets are pithy.
- Bring a glass of water.
- Keep the presentation moving
  - Don't get bogged down by questions.
  - Control the talk.
- Face your audience, not the screen or your notes.
My additions to BVZ's Advice

• Allow the audience to navigate where you are.
  – Outline in the beginning
  – (with timings for long talks)
  – Tell them where you are.

• Know your slide style and go with it.

• Know your talking style and go with it.
  – (First few words of every slide)

• If things get too dry, give the audience a break.
My additions to BVZ's Advice

• Prepare and iterate.
  – Pictures, pictures, pictures.
  – Slides filled with text are lazy (including these).
  – Unreadable graphs and graphics are lazy.
  – What's good in a paper is often not good in the talk.

• If you can, know your venue & your equipment.
  – Neither powerpoint nor openoffice/libreoffice are really portable.
My additions to BVZ's Advice

• Go over your presentation before you give it.
  – Even if you have given it before.
  – If you are inexperienced, go over it "live".
  – If parts are really hard, then script them.

• Don't be hungover.

• Mind the onion loaf.
My Biggest Disaster – DEC SRC, 1990

The senior people present:

Kai Li
Princeton
(my advisor)
Founder of Data Domain
(sold to EMC in 2009 for 2.1 billion)

Ed Lazowska
Washington
Multiple advisory boards to congress & the president.

David Cheriton
Stanford
"Professor billionaire"
580th wealthiest person in the world (Forbes)

John Guttag
MIT

Butler Lampson
SRC
Founder of Xerox PARC. Turing award winner.
My Biggest Disaster – DEC SRC, 1990

The students present (that I remember):

Brian Bershad
Professor at CMU, then back to Washington. Led Google operations in Seattle, now Russia.

Tom Anderson
Professor at Berkeley, then back to Washington.

Jeff Chase
Professor at Duke.

Kathy Yellick
Professor at Berkeley.

Mark Greenstreet
Professor at UBC.
What did I do?

- I had given the talk three months before to 300 people, so I didn't even give it a browse.
- I went to Gordon Biersch the night before and had about 6 beers.
- I didn't mind the onion loaf.
- And I got to watch faculty and students alike view me with disdain and disappointment.
(Go over the hall of shame)