

# SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA ACADEMY OF SCIENCES



## DO'S AND DON'TS FOR STUDENTS GIVING A TALK

This is a summary of the most important elements of a good presentation, and mistakes to avoid. For additional tips, see the “Scientifically Speaking” guidebook posted on this web site.

### **What to Do**

Talks must be no longer than 20 minutes, including 2 or 3 minutes for questions. Do a timed run-through of your talk to make sure it is the proper length with enough time left over for questions. Adjust your content accordingly.

Select key points from each section of your paper: Introduction, Materials and Methods, Results, Discussion, and Conclusions. You will not have time to present everything, so think carefully about what you want your audience to learn from your talk. Prepare your first and last sentences and then decide how to connect them.

Prepare an outline of your talk so that you can clearly see logical order in your presentation.

Select visual aids to go with your outline and key points. For graphs, make sure to label the axes and point these out to your audience.

Font sizes should be 18-point, preferably at least 20 to 24-point so that people in the back of the room can read all numbers and text.

Check grammar and spelling on all slides.

Make eye contact with your audience. They want to learn from your talk and be as interested in the topic as you are.

### **Common Mistakes and How to Avoid Them**

Do NOT read your talk. If you have notes, glance at them but do not read them to the audience.

Avoid excessive text. Some of your points, such as Methods and Conclusions, may be best conveyed with text rather than photos or graphs, but keep it short and concise. Bullet points are best. Your audience should be able to read the text without your help.

Avoid cluttered tables that are unreadable. If your audience can't read the table, it is not a visual aid. Consider putting the same information into a simple graph.

Avoid having too many slides that cause you to exceed your time limit or move too rapidly through your presentation. As a general rule, plan on only one or two slides per minute of presentation.

Avoid getting carried away with too many colors that distract the audience from your message. Keep in mind that some people are red-green colorblind. Yellow is hard to see on a light background.