Stuff About Bad Talks

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Outline

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Why the Audience Should Care

- I dunno.
- My professor told me to work on this problem.
- Here's my first result: . . . .

Let's Try Again

- Outlines are overrated.
  - Things you *have* to read have outlines.
  - Things you *want* to read have *plots*.
- Take the chance to grab your audience — give them a "plot synopsis".

Plot Synopsis

- If you give a good talk, the audience will learn something without being bored or disctracted.
- There are some definite things you should avoid doing.
- Some of these apply particularly to math (and theoretical CS) talks.

Outline

Things to Avoid Under Any Circumstances While You Are Preparing to Speak

- Dressing inappropriately
  - Minimum standards: clean, no holes or tears, no writing
- Chewing gum (or anything else)
- Not knowing how to use your computer
- Not having your slides finished
- Not having your computer (or the room's computer) ready when it's time to go

Things to Avoid Under Any Circumstances While You Are Speaking

- Random arm motions
- The presentation dance
- Reading the slide verbatim
- “Umm .... Oh sh*%& ....”
- Overly informal language
- Jargon
  - Technical talk is good, jargon is bad.
- Talking too fast
  - Time your presentation beforehand.
  - Adrenaline tends to make you speed up.
- Going over time

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Things to Avoid Under Any Circumstances In Your Slides

- Titles which aren't informative
- Titles which are too long
- Slides which don't impart any information
- Too many bells and whistles

- Excessive use of a laser pointer or mouse
- Typoes

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More Things to Avoid Under Any Circumstances In Your Slides

- Unreadable color combinations
- Changing colors for no reason

Things to Avoid in Any Kind of Twenty-Minute Talk

- Too much detail
  - “The purpose of a 20-minute talk is to get the audience to read your paper.”
- Too much time spent road-mapping
- Writing on the whiteboard/chalkboard

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Issues with Mathematical Content

- Know your audience
  - Don't underestimate, **but**...
  - Don't overestimate, either.
  - Your audience will not be experts on **your particular topic**.
- Some formulas are good, but not too many.
- Format your formulas correctly: E = mc^2 vs. $E = mc^2$.

Issues with Graphics

- Graphics are good.
- Informative graphics are even better.
  - Include labels on graphs.
  - For each graph, first say:
    - What the axes are.
    - What this is a graph of.
- Tables are not as good.
  - Tables (or text) that are too small are really bad.
  - This often happens if you clip text out of another document.

POLICY FOR RESPONSIBLE USE OF ROSE-HULMAN COMPUTING FACILITIES

GENERAL GUIDELINES
This policy applies to all computing equipment, networks, network connections, software, and services provided, maintained, or operated by the Waters Computing Center for Rose-Hulman In short, it applies to all Institute computing facilities and services, and to all users. In some cases, it may be superseded or modified by policies of departments with their own computing facilities. However, where departmental facilities are used for tasks that involve facilities or services provided by the Waters Computing Center, this policy will apply.

Computing facilities are provided by the Institute to support and enhance the educational experience for every student. They also are intended to assist the faculty's professional activities and to provide administrative support for the Institute. Therefore, their misuse harms every member of the Rose-Hulman community. Since everyone benefits from efficient system management, the Computing Center staff encourages suggestions of ways to improve operations.

Things that Mathematicians Tend to Dislike

- Cutsey or gimmicky graphics, sound effects, animations
- Busy backgrounds
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What the Audience Should Take Away

- Don't repeat your introduction.
- Really don't repeat your outline.
- What were the most important things you found out?
- What else would you like to do?
- How else could someone use the information?

Question and Answer

- If you don't know the answer, don't be afraid to say so.
- If you can answer partially, or a related question, go ahead.
- Refer to sources if appropriate.
- Don't act like a question is stupid . . .
- But don't act like you are too stupid for the question, either.
- Ask the questioner to rephrase if necessary.