

COSC 91/191, Spring 2019

Lecture 12

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1 Announcements

Two quick announcements before the beginning of class:

- Assignment 2 is posted on the website. Instead of critiquing the organization of “Stupid Columnsort Tricks,” we are now critiquing its style and usage.
- Drafts for the final paper are due in three weeks. Topics should be discussed with Tom beforehand.

2 Types of Talks

There are four major types of academic talks:

- Poster talks are typically 10 minutes or less. Because of the time constraint, there is only time to state the problem and the results. In Tom’s opinion, this is the second hardest type of talk to give (the first hardest being job talks).
- Conference talks are the most familiar talks to graduate students and last 20–30 minutes. Typically, conference talks are advertisements for the paper being presented. In other words, your main goal is to entice the listener into reading your paper for more information.
- Colloquium talks are very similar to conference talks in terms of preparation but last between 45–60 minutes. Because of the increased duration, you can go into more depth.
- Job talks are the most difficult type of talk to give. In 45 to 60 minutes, you must convince your audience (1) that your work is interesting, (2) that your work is deep, (3) that your work is fundable, (4) that you are a good teacher,¹ (5) that you will be a good colleague, (6) that there will be follow-on work, and (7) that you will be an asset to the institution. Because you might not get any feedback until you have given all the job talks, they are considered the most difficult talk to give.

3 How to Prepare Your Talk

In this lecture, we focus on how to prepare a talk. The important components of a talk are the contents, visuals, and verbal presentations. When brainstorming your talk, jot down anything that might be of interest, prune out details that are not imperative to your talk, and then reorganize as needed.

It is imperative to not hide the limitations of your work, or else it will feel like you were trying to deceive the audience. Consequently, be upfront with any downsides and limitations from the beginning of the talk.

¹If the institution values teaching; some do not.

Do not have too much in your talk for the time allotted. Do *not* run over the time limit. During a conference talk, there will typically be a person who indicates how much time is left. It is important to acknowledge them with a subtle head nod and stay on schedule.

Give your audience guide posts so they know where you are within the presentation. Include an outline and display it once a section is complete, highlighting where you are within the presentation. If you anticipate questions on a particular slide, perhaps hyperlink those slides at the end of the presentation so you can quickly go back to reference them.

4 Visuals of a Presentation

Give yourself plenty of time to prepare the visuals of your presentation. If you do it in an hour, your audience will know and will not be happy. Stylistically speaking, you should observe the following slide rules:

- Use a plain white background with a dark font. Definitely do not use the inverse.
- Do not use a variable background (i.e., gradients) because there is no single font color that has enough contrast on every part of the slide.
- Do not copy visuals straight from the paper. Rework them so that they project well (e.g., thicken lines, replace serif fonts with sans-serif fonts).
- Use a sans-serif font. Serif fonts read well on paper, but do not project well.
- Do not use color to show off; use color to teach.
- Full sentences are okay, but full paragraphs are not.
- Use large type. You should be able to read it 10 feet away from your laptop.
- Think of each slide as a single paragraph within the paper. The slide title is the paragraph's topic sentence.
- Pictures speak louder than words; use images often.
- Use animations only when necessary.
- Avoid uncovering bullet points one by one as the audience will not be able to read ahead.

5 Miscellanea

- Do not hide anything from your audience. If there are limitations, be transparent about them.
- Do not use red and green to differentiate between things. It confuses color-blind audience members.
- Bring whatever dongles you think you might need. Do not count on your venue having what you need.
- Have all of the important parts in your slide deck.
- Know exactly what you want to say.

- Avoid saying *um*; filter your nervous tick.
- Do not script your talk; it should be spontaneous.
- First, practice your talk while you are sitting. Time the talk and make corrections. Then, practice your talk standing and time it again. Finally, practice in front of a live audience. Repeat this step multiple times and enlist new audience members.
- Make sure you know how to connect your laptop in the venue.
- Identify yourself, especially if there is more than one author.
- Use a remote to switch between slides.
- Overemphasize consonants.
- Practice presenting with your arms by your side. It feels goofy, but it looks better than it feels.
- When questions are asked, repeat each question so everyone is aware.
- Never bluff when you do not know.
- State important information in the beginning. Summarize it again in the conclusion.
- Do not spend so much time on motivations that you cannot spend enough time on results.
- Give a performance. Have fun.
- Vary what you are doing, move around a bit.
- Find people who are giving good vibes, and look at them frequently.
- Assuming you have a good personality, let it show!
- Avoid swagger and vanity.
- Attention capital drains quickly during talks. Get to the important points quickly while capital is still available.
- Repeat key ideas.