Presentations in a Professional Setting

Richard N. Taylor

Information and Computer Science

University of California, Irvine

Irvine, California 92697-3425

+1-949-824-6429   Fax: +1-949-824-4056

http://www.ics.uci.edu/~taylor

You and Your Audience

- **Know your audience**
  - what do they know?
  - what are they interested in?
  - what is their objective?

- **Respect your audience.**
  - assume they are smart and knowledgeable
  - but be prepared to answer a question of any sophistication
  - NEVER put down a questioner

- **Dress appropriately for the occasion**

- **Know your objectives**

Content

- **If you talk is boring to you, it is probably boring to the audience**

- **If something is obvious, don't say it**
  - **don't just go through the motions**

- **If it is non-obvious, explain it.**

- **Project status report**
  - **Candor is essential, for any audience**
  - **Your management wants your project to succeed; they need info to help**

Slide Content

- **Seldom have sentences on slides, and never long ones, like this one, which runs along for quite a long ways, and succeeds in irritating many people and certainly prevents them from paying attention to what you are saying.**

- **Bullets should not be too brief**
  - **they would likely be obvious**
  - **or else not illuminating**

- **Use graphics and color**
  - **but only where they have semantic utility**
  - **good diagrams are an excellent resource**

- **Dense slides v. sparse slides**
  - **If dense, then don't think you have to cover everything**
  - **If sparse, then copies of your slides won't be of much use**

- **Use a spelling checker**

- **Use large enough fonts**
  - **36 for titles, 24 for main heads (maybe 20), 16 for small stuff**
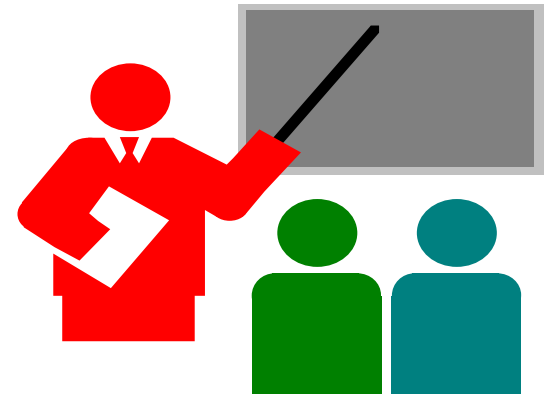
Presentation and Questions

- **Practice your talk**
  - do it out loud.
  - have a friend listen and critique it

- **If you do a bad job on your first presentation, you may not get to do a second one.**

- **Be prepared to give your talk in arbitrary order.**

- **Listen carefully to questions**
  - the questioner may be coming at the topic from a very different perspective

- **Answer questions when they are asked; don't keep people waiting (exception: unless the answer is on the next slide).**

Timing
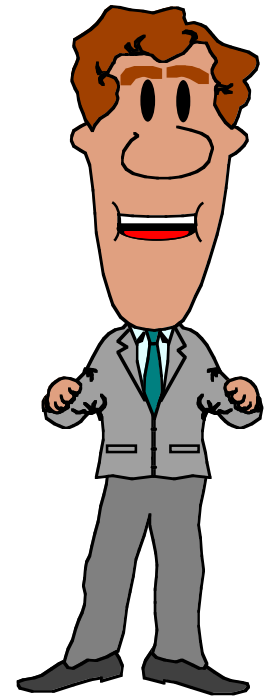
- Hour long talks are easy. 5 minute talks are easy. 20 minutes is very hard; 15 is most difficult.

- About 3 minutes per slide is typical
  - can vary from 1-5 minutes

- A long talk should have summary slides

- Repeat your main points at the end

- Leave plenty of room for questions

- Be prepared to manage questions so that you accomplish your key objectives
  - skip ahead if necessary

- If you hand out copies of your slides, people will read ahead.