

Dos and Don'ts of Giving Formal 20 Minute Talks

AY597

20 Minute Talks and Your Future

If you plan on continuing in astronomy past graduate school, you will have to get used to being judged by how you give talks by people in a position to hire you.

Your AAS dissertation talk will most likely be your first true judgment, and probably the most important in your early career.

Personally, what I learned in my current topics/public speaking class in graduate school was as useful (if not more) as any of my lecture courses.

Don't take public speaking preparation lightly!

Choice of Topic

Preferably, you should talk about research you have done yourself, since you will be so much more familiar with it.

However, younger grad students who have not done enough research to have some concrete results should pick a timely paper on astro-ph that either:

- 1) relates to research they are working on or
- 2) is of interest to a broad swath of the astronomy community or is particularly compelling

Outline of Your Talk

1) Introduction:

- what your topic is about
- why it is important (why should your audience listen)
- what specific questions you will address

6) Background

- previous work done on this topic (including work of a potential future employer in your audience!)

10) Main Body

12) Summary of Key Results

- it never hurts to repeat yourself on the key results
- include future work if possible

Dos and Don'ts

- Do** practice giving the talk several times in advance:
 - it shouldn't sound memorized, but you should definitely know which slide/concept comes next
 - you only have 15 minutes to present your entire PhD presentation at a AAS meeting – be efficient!
- Do** try to eliminate “umms” and “uhhs” as best you can:
 - this can be difficult, but practicing the talk 4-5 times before will help
- Do** use a bit of color to draw attention to your main points
 - but don't overdue color

Dos and Don'ts

Don't present material you are not familiar with:

- if the paper is too complex, choose a different paper
- if there is a small part of the paper you do not understand in an otherwise reasonable paper, don't present the unfamiliar material (never say "I didn't understand this part")

Don't read from your overheads

- one of the worst mistakes one can make

Don't overload your slides with walls of text

- stick to the key points you want to make

What if I am Asked a Question to Which I Do Not Know the Answer?

Be honest, but try to say something reasonable

- don't try to BS, an expert in the field will catch you

Often, you can say that your future plans involve addressing the issue the questioner just raised.

If they keep harassing you, say “We can talk more about this offline”.