Version 1.2 Thursday, 13. October 2022

Guidelines for Talks

by R. Harlander

1. You should be able to give your talk without looking at your slides. Make sure that you really can do that: close the lid of your laptop, and give the talk to yourself. If you find yourself cheating, repeat the exercise.

2. Once you have achieved this, you will notice that you don't need full sentences on your slides: keywords are sufficient. Even better: images without text. If people need to read what's on the slides, they won't be able to focus on what you say. If you read the slides to them, why would they need slides?

3. Slides do not have to be self-contained: they are there to illustrate what you say.

4. Formulas on slides do not have to be exact, they should be schematic (but correct). You should make clear that they are schematic though.

5. After step 1, you may notice that at some point you may want to refer to a previous slide: never ever switch backwards in your slides during the presentation though, except when somebody in the audience asks you to. If you need to refer to something on an earlier slide, repeat it on the current slide when preparing your talk.

6. If you quote a passage from the literature (will rarely happen in physics talks), put it on the slides and read it literally to the audience. Then repeat it with your own words in as simple terms as possible. Possibly illustrate it with an example.

7. Assume that the audience is a group of government representatives who decide whether you get paid in the next year or not. In other words: make sure that the audience is not getting lost or bored (90% of the audience does not know what you're talking about!), advertise your research, and be excited about it!

8. Spend about one third of your talk on the introduction: What are you talking about? What is the current status? What are important historical and recent milestones? What is still missing? Why is your contribution important?

9. Refer to the literature by quoting the names of the authors and the year of the publication. Do not (only) use arXiv numbers or journal/volume/year.

10. It is sometimes good to say at the beginning of your talk what your final result will be.

11. If you are a student, rehearse your talk with fellow students. Do that well in advance, because you may need some time to take into account suggestions.