

## Tips on Giving Talks

(Observations from a Frequent Seminar Attendee)

- I. Speak with pride
  - a. **Never apologize about your talk.**
  - b. Be passionate about your topic—if you don't appear to find your own talk interesting, your audience certainly won't.
  - c. Don't be ironic or sarcastic about your topic.
- II. Know and respect your audience:
  - a. Consider what will interest them.
  - b. Consider what they will find funny.
  - c. Consider what they will sympathize with.
  - d. **Never insult or condescend to your audience**
- III. Give a clear, focused talk
  - a. Make one, or at most two, points.
  - b. Repeat your point several times in different ways.
- IV. Structure of your talk
  - a. Say your name at the beginning and end of your talk.
  - b. For talks longer than 5 minutes, give a (very brief) outline.
  - c. Don't start by greeting the audience; instead introduce yourself and your topic. "My name is \_\_\_ and today I will tell you about \_\_\_".
- V. Timing and delivery of your talk
  - a. **Never, never, never, run over your allotted time.**
  - b. Stand still while talking.
  - c. Don't play with chalk, markers, laser pointer, etc. when talking.
  - d. Look at the audience as much as possible—actually try to catch the eye of different members of the audience.
  - e. It's perfectly fine to pause if you need to collect your thoughts.
  - f. If possible, be cheerful and smile during your talk (but don't laugh unless everyone does).
- VI. Dealing with the audience:
  - a. If possible, defer all questions until the end of your talk.
  - b. Repeat or rephrase each question so the audience will know what you're replying to.
  - c. Always be polite to members of the audience, no matter what they say (if they're obnoxious, most of the audience will sympathize with you).
  - d. Don't let anyone in the audience answer a question or give a speech—politely, but firmly, say that their issue would be interesting to talk about after your talk.
  - e. Don't be worried about experts in the audience, they're probably happy to hear about their favorite topic.
- VII. Viewgraphs and other visual aids
  - a. Where possible, use an "Assertion-Evidence" model for your slides:
    - i. Title: Short sentence that states main assertion of the slide
    - ii. Body: Visual evidence for the assertion: picture, graph, table
  - b. Don't put blocks of text on your viewgraphs—your audience will read the viewgraph instead of listening to you.
  - c. Review your viewgraphs until you know everything on them.
  - d. Avoid including videos in your talk or handing around physical artifacts, unless the video or artifact makes a clear point that warrants the time and distraction.
- VIII. General advice
  - a. Don't be concerned about being nervous; *everyone* is nervous before they give a talk.
  - b. Don't dread giving talks—remember that it is an honor to have any audience take the time to listen to you.