

## **Giving an academic presentation: what's all the fuss about?**

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FFR141 Complex systems seminars

## **Today**

- Introduction (with learning outcomes) and inventory
- **The academic presentation – preparation, form and delivery**
- **Time-to-speak/exercise:** 60-second Elevator Pitch:  
*“Complex Systems in a Nutshell”*
- (If there's time...Feedback / opposition – expectations on an (oral context) academic discussion)

## Learning outcomes (sort of)

- After this seminar, students should be able to:
  - structure and prepare an academic presentation on the basis of a general and conventional pattern
  - make communicative choices relevant for the presentation
  - give the presentation the right kind of focus in terms of purpose and contents

## Your presentation skills

1. How good a presenter are you? How would you rank yourself from 1-5?
2. How important is it for you to be a good presenter? How important is it here / for your future?
3. How can you develop your presentation skills?

## Course Goal

The complex systems seminar course has dual objectives. The first is to become exposed to different issues, advances and problems in complexity science and to aid in the development of a picture of the scope of complex systems research. **The second is for the students to improve their ability to prepare and hold presentations.**

You will be scheduled **to prepare and present a presentation.**  
You will also be scheduled **to serve as discussion leader for one other presentation.**

## Overview

### Preparation

- Purpose
- Contents
- Focus
- Technology and aids
- Length and timing
- Audience inventory

### Form

- Type of presentation
- Structure and coherence
- Language and style

### Delivery

- Nervousness
- Creating "rapport"
- Reactions
- Using a script
- Vocal resources
- Slides
- Visuals

# Preparation

...What? Who? Why? When? Where? How? With the help of what?

# Purpose

- What do **you** want to have happen as a result of your presentation?
  - [→ Audience] How do you want to affect your audience?
  - [→ Presenter] Where will you “be” after this presentation?

State your purpose EARLY on (unless strategic to keep it from audience)!

## Choose contents (very) carefully

- Purpose clear? Find material matching the purpose (not the other way round)
- Go for little rather than much (“When you ask somebody the time, you don’t expect a lecture on how wrist watches are constructed”)
- Evaluate your sources

## Establish FOCUS

- Golden rule: three things you want to communicate
- Remember: What do you want to have happen?
- Main points...supported by SOME supporting points
- Avoid ALL unnecessary details, i.e. be super selective
- Do not become too technical

## Technology and aids

- Your own computer? Will your computer like the projector?
- USB? Will the presentation computer like the memory stick?
- Mail to yourself? Dropbox? Will the Wi-Fi work?
- Overhead transparencies – is the machine working?
- Test all technology ahead of time
- (Good old) handouts (still) work well in many academic contexts
- The black/white board?
- **What serves your purpose best?**

## Length and timing

- No limit?
- Conference setting?
- 20/10 or 40/20? Keynote?
- Time yourself!
- Live in L2 = slower (Hincks, 2010)
- Estimate typically 1-2 minutes/slide

## Audience inventory

- Expectations and interests?
- Level of background knowledge
- Intercultural communication (let's not get into that today!)
- Level of language ability?
- Simplicity? Complexity?
- Oh, and be very (very!) careful with jokes and word play

## Audience background and expectations

- **Directness**
  - Asian cultures – indirect approach
  - American (and partly EU) culture – more direct
- **“Tone”** Carté & Fox (2004)
  - GB perspective: US presentations were “overly optimistic, boastful and superficial”
  - US perspective: GB presentations were “gloomy, pessimistic, preoccupied with problems, no solutions”

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# Form

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## Type of presentation

- Different kinds of presentations
  - Professional or academic?
  - Scripted
  - “Key worded”
  - Impromptu presentation
- Which type are you?



## Structure

- All good presentations have these three parts:
  - **Introduction:** Opening; very short background, contextualisation; purpose, overview (last)
  - **Main part:** Remember not to have too many points
  - **Conclusion:** A sense of closure; summing up the main points; answer any RQs; hypotheses
- Make sure you KNOW your talk (all the “ins”, “outs” and escape routes)

## Introductions

- The first impression – make it yourself
- Get audience’s attention
- Checklist:
  - Start with your topic! Don’t repeat your title
  - (Probably no need to say who you are)
  - Establish contact
  - Establish purpose
  - Establish presentation structure (on a visual?)
  - Establish (probe for?) expectations
  - Establish motivation (why listen to you?)
- ....that’s your first 30 seconds gone!

## Conclusions

- Final impression – have expectations been met?
- End in a strong way – not with a sigh (*“Well... that’s it.....I believe....”*)
- Checklist:
  - Summarize
  - State what you hope they got out of the presentation (reiterate purpose)
  - Tell them where more information is available (*Academia* or *Researchgate* perhaps?)
  - Thank the audience
  - Ask for questions

## Structure

- Guidance:
  - Where are you?
  - Where have you been?
  - Where are you going?

**Be explicit!**

E.g. *“Now we know that X is squared, and we learnt before that Y is also squared. Let’s move on to see where this leaves Z in this system.”*

- Coherence:
  - transitions
  - repetition of central themes/ideas, phrases

## Bridging the gap

- Signal linguistically as you move from point to point
- Help the audience appreciate how the presentation constitutes a coherent whole
- Consider these helpful phrases:

### Student resources – linking phrases to be used in oral presentations

Here are some of the phrases you can use to link together the different parts of your presentation. They also give a clear signal to the audience as to the point you have reached in your structure: they are a commentary on your progress.

#### *Introduction*

I'd like to say a few words to you today about...  
 talk to you today about...  
 explain some of the main features of  
 I'll take only about 10 minutes of your time.  
 To illustrate some of my points, I'll be using...  
 I intend to show you...  
 I've divided my talk into 5 main sections / parts / headings.  
 If you have any questions, I'll be glad to answer them at the end.  
 please feel free to interrupt.

#### *Starting*

To start with, then, I'd like to consider...  
 First of all, then...  
 Firstly...  
 Let me begin by saying...

#### *Finishing a point*

Well, that's all I have to say about...  
 So that, then, is...  
 Now we've dealt with...  
 That takes care of...  
 Now, let's turn to my next point, which is...  
 Let's move on to...  
 The next point I'd like to make is...  
 Next we come to...  
 Turning now to...

#### *Leaving the structure*

Incidentally...  
 By the way...

#### *Returning to your structure*

Coming back to the subject of my talk...  
 To come back to...

## Language matters

- “Kill your darlings”
- Simplicity and clarity
- Check pronunciation
- Anticipate questions: explain unfamiliar terms right away

## Language matters

- **Spoken** language – not spoken written language
- Presentations more “informal” than most students think
  - Use active clauses (with “agents”), not passive clauses
  - Use personal pronouns (“I”, “we”, “you”, etc.)
  - Use shorter sentences; we typically use few(er) subclauses when we speak

# Delivery

# Nerves

- (Almost) everyone is nervous
- This not football - adrenalin is good, to an extent...
- Audience most often won't notice (*"Cool as cucumber..."*)
- What can you do?
  - People are on your side
  - Come early
  - Relax before (no last minute rehearsal)
  - Chat with sb in the audience
  - Start off sloooooowly

# Rapport

- Eye contact
- Personal pronouns
- Reference to shared experience
- Face the audience (not the screen, door etc.)
- If you are short, don't stand behind the computer
- Smile!
- Check audience reactions

# Rapport

- American study (Beebe, 1974)
  - Group A speakers + Group B speakers
  - Different groups of audience
  - 7 minute presentations
  - Group A speakers were instructed to "look at the audience a lot"; group B speakers instructed to "look seldom at the audience"
- **Result:** Speakers who look at the audience a lot are perceived as more **knowledgeable**, more **experienced**, more **honest** and more **likable** than the other speakers

## Check reactions

- “Read” your audience!
- Adapt your talk
- Flexibility
- A break?
- An ace up your sleeve?

## To use or not to use a script...

- Your own choice, but limit yourself
- First/last minute-strategy
- Try not to memorize
- Key words are usually very good
- Noisy papers
- Note cards

## Vocal resources

- Avoid flat tones
- Be guided by the “coffee machine talk policy”
- Stress important words
- Pauses are effective—don’t rush (common error)
- Speak to the back of the room

## Slides

- Give time on visuals
- Maintain eye contact – let PP do the pointing
  - Use a large font
- Avoid (technical terms) or difficult foreign words
- 6X6 rule
- Conservative design
- Prof read
- Bullets rather than sentences
- Meaningful headings
- Calm background



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## Visuals

Spend plenty of time on visuals (consider a separate handout)

Point, show and guide the audience through your material when relevant

Use (simple) animations to focus the attention

Beware of eye-candy and noise...

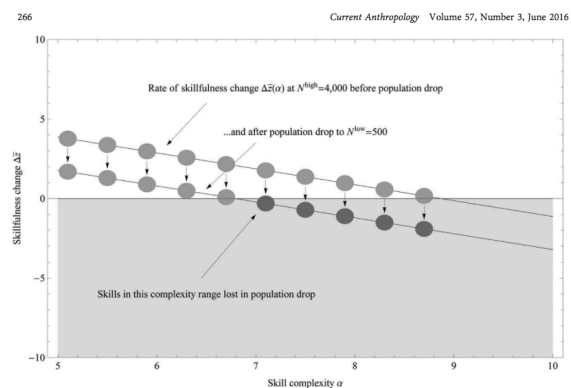


Figure 3. Mechanism of loss of cultural complexity  $\alpha$  at the population level via loss of skillfulness  $z$  on the level of skills. Decreasing the population from  $N = 4,000$  to  $N = 500$ , an interval of skills with high values of  $\alpha$  going from positive to negative values of  $\Delta z$  (see eq. [2] here and in Henrich 2004). This moves the skills from the cumulative to the maladaptive (red) regime, leading to their deterioration and abandonment by the process illustrated in Figure 2. It should be noted that the magnitude of  $\Delta z$  is not centrally important; apart from some statements about the speed of evolution, the overshadowing importance of  $\Delta z$  for the main thrust of the treadmill model is whether it is positive or negative. A color version of this figure is available online.

## Exercise: 60-second Elevator Pitch

- Purpose: presentation practice in informal setting on being concise and to the point!
- Your topic: *"Complex Systems in a nutshell"*
- 60-second talk
  - Introduce the topic
  - Highlight key issues in Complex Systems
  - Special emphasis on opening and closing
- Prepare your talk in groups of three
- Here's an [example](#)
- [Here](#) is a business oriented guide for how pitch talks can be designed (study this later if you like)

## Time

- Thinking back on what you have just heard....
- **5 minutes:** search out relevant material, structure it and compare notes with two colleagues
- **10 minutes:** prepare and deliver pitch presentation (remember 60 seconds only!) in groups of three... listen to each other, and give constructive feedback
- **Last 10 minutes:**
  - listen to some presentations (perhaps?)
  - discuss your observations

## As you listen to a pitch.....

- Think about the following questions:
  - How does s/he begin her talk?
  - How does s/he try to include her audience?
  - How does s/he end her talk?
  - Is s/he effective? Why (not)?
- Take notes for discussion later in the group and in class

## Discussion session/acting as discussant

## Basic rules of engagement

A conversation concerning all those present...not just the presenters and yourselves

A constructive dialogue which involves analysis, comments and advice

Forget about surface level stuff...make it an academic conversation

## Suggested order for the discussion

1. The opponents thank the presenters
2. The opponents explain to the audience what they have read /heard
3. The opponents ask questions and create discussion around the text's content and form.
4. The opponents should adapt these comments / questions during the presentation – are there additional questions? Have some questions been answered?
5. The opponents sum up their opinions
6. The opponents conclude by thanking the presenters once more

## How can this be done?

- **Use probing questions rather than definite statements**
- *Is there perhaps more than one answer to this question? (Ask a question)*
- *Do you think you might want to be a bit careful with some of your source material? (Cautionary critique, and many implications)*
- *Is this your own idea or one provided by your source material? Could you make that clearer? (Provide a suggestion)*

## Want more help?

[Chalmers writing centre](#)