

# How To Give A Terrible Talk

By **Harry S. Delugach**  
Delugach@cs.uah.edu

In this lesson, we are going to learn how to give a terrible talk, whether it's being presented at your place of work, or to your peers. For most of this lesson, we'll assume you're asked to give a talk using an overhead projector and/or computer-generated slides.

## Goals of a Terrible Talk

Every task should have a goal, and a terrible talk is no exception. Have these goals in mind while you prepare your terrible talk:

- **Confuse your audience**
- **Make yourself look smart and superior**
- **Make your audience feel stupid and inferior**
- **Take up valuable time without conveying any information**

## How to Accomplish These Goals

In order to accomplish these goals, the speaker must diligently follow all of the following guidelines.

### 1. All audiences are alike

Since all audiences are alike, you may prepare your talk without regard for who will be in the audience. All audience members come to a talk with the same experience and expectations.

### 2. Jump into your subject without introduction

Don't waste your time setting the stage or getting a feel for what your audience already knows. Your first slide should immediately begin the technical details you really want to present.

### 3. Use words and phrases without defining them

This will make you sound smart and smug. It will also make your audience feel stupid and inferior because you'll act as though they should already know what the terms mean.

### 4. Use lots of slides

Present your material as fast as you can. A good rule of thumb is to present at least one slide every thirty seconds, even if you can't talk that fast. Whatever you do, don't ever present slides at a slow pace, say, one slide every four minutes. Be sure to spend exactly the same amount of time on every slide, no matter how much material there is, or how hard it is to understand. Slides should definitely be included if you think they are irrelevant to the current audience.

### 5. Cram as much material as you can onto each slide

Get as much material on each slide as you can. Overwhelm and impress the audience with how much you've got to present.

## **6. Go through every slide no matter what happens**

Once you've decided on your slides, don't ever change your talk. Don't skip slides, even if you've used up all the time allotted to your talk. No one will mind if you use up an extra fifteen or thirty minutes, especially not the speaker whose talk is scheduled right after yours.

## **7. Don't bother with "backup" slides**

So-called "backup" slides (i.e., slides that you have ready just in case you need to elaborate your points) will conflict with the purpose of the previous guideline. You're in charge of the talk, you decide what's going to be included. You know best what needs to be presented.

## **8. Read every word on your slides**

Be sure to read every word to your audience. That way you won't have to explain anything else or elaborate your points. And audiences love to be read to! It reminds them of those happy and relaxing times when they were little children having their parents read stories to them before bedtime. It also caters to those members of your audience who are too stupid to read.

## **9. Don't make room for questions**

Audience questions will just divert you from your primary purpose. Don't ask for questions. If someone raises their hand, pretend you don't see them. If they call out a question by themselves, pretend you didn't hear it. Have confidence that you'll cover everything that needs to be covered in your talk.

## **10. Don't give the audience time to think or react to your slides**

Giving more time will just increase audience participation, interaction and feedback, which might tempt you into changing your focus. Giving them time to think may also get the audience feeling that they've gotten something out of your talk, and then you won't have wasted their valuable time, as stated in the overall goals of a terrible talk.

## **11. Don't pay attention to questions**

If someone (despite your efforts in item 9 or 10) in your audience manages to ask a question, just make up an empty answer. Whatever you do, don't take notes or write down any ideas -- after all, how important can a question be?

## **12. Don't rehearse your talk**

Audiences like the fresh, spontaneous feel of a talk that's never been presented before. Don't let anyone see or hear your talk beforehand; that might reduce their confusion or hinder your goal of making them feel stupid and inferior. If you're giving a twenty minute talk but you've got a forty minute presentation, just go even faster (see no. 10 above); why waste time preparing a custom presentation? And don't worry about whether your slides will look okay on another computer -- software is always compatible.

## **13. Turn your paper directly into slides**

It's easy to present a talk based on a paper -- just make one slide from each page of the paper and you're done. And never re-draw a figure -- simply reduce it until it fits the size of your slide page. Don't worry about whether your audience can read tiny font sizes -- you'll be reading the slides to them anyway.

## **14. Have no purpose**

You're just giving a talk. Don't worry about why you're doing it. Just present it and sit down.