The Oral Presentation

• People say public speaking is the number one fear
  —Death is 6th!

• "The human brain starts working the moment you are born and never stops until you stand up to speak in public.”
  —George Jessel
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The Scientist as a Performer - Why?

• Communicate your findings to colleagues
• Establish scientific priority
• Public relations
  – You
  – Tenure and promotion
  – Your research group/PI

Presentation skills may get you the job, the grant, or the invitation to Europe!
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Defining the Scope of the Task

• Understand the background of your audience
  – Scope of session
  – Who’ll be there? What will they know?
  – Practitioners versus scientists

• Know who the session leaders are
• Know who the other speakers are
  – Should your talk be coordinated with those of others?
The Oral Research Presentation

Structure of a 20 Minute Talk

• Background (2-4 slides)
• Aim of the study & RQs (1 slide – essential!)
• Brief methods (2-5 slides)
• Results (4-8 slides)
• Summary/Conclusions (1 slide)
• Implications/Future Research (1 slide)
• Tips for students early in their program
  – “Make it pretty!”

No more than
18-22 slides in total!
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Avoiding Technical Snafus

• Take care with colors, font size, overcrowding
  – Project before the meeting
  – Don’t apologize for slides (or need to)
• Arrive at the session room at least 15 minutes prior to the start of the session – run through the slides
• Have back-up systems in place
  – CD/zip/removable media plus laptop
  – Give a labeled copy of your presentation to your mentor or a trustworthy colleague or put in “dropbox”
  – Never check your presentation with your luggage!
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Tips for Delivery

• Short words/sentences/paragraphs
  – Avoid jargon and abbreviations
• Plan out your transitions from each slide carefully
  – The audience cannot go back and review
• Establish and maintain eye contact
  – Place a friend in a strategic location
• Don’t hesitate to show expression/enthusiasm/personality!
• Script your presentation or go freestyle (but practice and time your presentation)
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Overcoming Anxiety

• Practice, practice, practice!
  – Present to a variety of audiences if possible
  – Your talk will almost certainly get longer on the day; allow for this!
  – Use outline notes to ensure coverage of key points

• Physical considerations
  – Feet apart
  – Hands on podium
  – Pointer off between points!
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The role of rehearsal:

“It takes three weeks to prepare a good ad lib speech”

Mark Twain
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Handling Questions

• You are the expert
  – Prepare among friends
  – Insist that they challenge you

• It’s OK to say you don’t know, or haven’t done the experiment yet

• The three “D”’s
  – Defend (nicely)
  – Deflect
  – Defer
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Handling Questions

• Different types – handle accordingly
  • Need clarification
  • Suggest something helpful
  • Want to engage in research dialog
  • Show that he/she is better than you
• Anticipate questions (additional slides)
• Don’t let them highjack the talk (postpone)
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Closing Thoughts

- Presenting your work orally is a wonderful opportunity to further your career
- The keys to success are preparation, precision and practice
- Always have a back-up plan
- Develop your own style
- Be enthusiastic
- Try to have fun!