

Liz Bradley's Presentations Hints

- Keep your hands out of your pockets. Project enthusiasm, but stop short of eagerness. Move around the front of the room — chaotically.
- Maintain eye contact with the entire room. Identify “indicators” early on: people whose faces are expressive and whom you can watch for comprehension/confusion calibration.
- Dress so you're comfortable (or get comfortable in a suit or dress).
- Indicate things on the screen, not on your laptop or on the overhead projector platform. Buy yourself a pointer; you'll use it forever and you won't have to scramble to borrow one right before a talk. Only use laser pointers in big rooms where you can't reach the screen with a normal pointer; they're distracting and they magnify hand wobbles. And, apropos of hand wobbles, you can let the tip of your pointer touch the screen in order to steady shaky hands.
- Don't read your slides to the audience. In fact, try not to verbalize *any* combination of the words on the slide, verbatim. Vary the order, use synonyms, expand, or distill.
- Make sure that the text, drawings, and symbols on your slides are large enough; set up a projector in the lecture room the day before you give the talk and go to the back of the room to check. (That's a good time to check whether your computer will speak nicely to the projector, if you're using digital technology.)
- Keep the amount of information on each slide small and closely related. A well-selected and -constructed slide should require no more than two–five minutes of discussion.
- Maintain a high, ongoing ratio of organization/outline/intro/summary to technical content. Everyone in the audience should, at every point in your talk, know where the current subtopic came from, what its motivation is, and where it's going. Using (and returning to) an outline slide can help with this, as can running footers on your slides.
- If you're using overheads, make sure you have a few extra transparencies and a felt-tip pen along for discussion and corrections. Don't cover up part of your slide with paper; doing so initiates a serious (subconscious) control struggle between you and your audience. Rather, break the slide down into several smaller chunks (each on a separate slide) or use overlays. (This is extremely easy with PowerPoint.)
- If you're using PowerPoint, don't go overboard with embellishments, fonts, fades, animations, etc. It has been shown that the good old-fashioned black-on-white is the most effective representation for conveying information. Some people are even put off by glitzy graphics, assuming that you put that much effort into the

presentation because your work was somehow lacking. (This is especially true in mathematics.)

- If you're planning to project from a laptop and you haven't been able to check out the A/V setup ahead of time, it's worth bringing hard copies of the slides with you, just in case.
- Don't leave home without the appropriate dongles!!! And don't ever check the bag that holds your presentation materials into the belly of an airplane. Keep them in that overhead bin.
- Some people believe in the 1/3-1/3-1/3 ratio: that your whole audience should be with you for the first third of the talk, people in your field should follow the first two thirds, and you should lose all but one person for the last third. I think this is nonsense; it's *really* hard to give a clear talk about tough material, and most people know that. Some junior faculty — and many grad students — don't think you're smart unless they can't understand you, so there's a lot of pressure to be abstruse. One way to compromise is to vastly raise the intellectual level whenever you're answering an audience question. Then they'll know that you can blow them out of the water but are choosing not to :-)
- A corollary of this is to learn how to say "I don't know" when you don't know. Trying to wing it can be painfully obvious, and will leave people with far less respect for you than if you'd said "I have absolutely no idea..." and then tried to reason out the answer.