Talk Strategy / Slide Etiquette

Based on a Graduate Student, Postdoc Seminar Talk given by Aaron Lee & Adrian Liu (UCB Astro; 3/1/2013)

Always keep in mind:

- What are your 3-4 main take away points?
- Maximize your signal to noise on every slide.
- Short term memory can only hold 7 +- 2 items at once.

Talk Strategies

- Answer the "so what" question right away (even before the outline slide)
- Make the outline slide a "conclusions-lite" slide.
- Overloading slides overwhelms the listener.
- People tend to listen rather than read slides. Full typed sentences are optional.
- Employ "effective redundancy": Your speech, text, and graphics should reinforce each other.
- Repetition can be a form of emphasis, but you should not read your slides.
- Try "cycling" : Deliver the idea first in brief, then in detail, then in summary.
- Try "near miss": Is there an analogy that would help the general audience member?
- Try "verbal punctuation": e.g., "Now that we have X, let's use it to get Y."

Slide Backgrounds

- Should contrast with your text.
- Should not draw the attention of the viewer.
- Should never be pretty astro images, no matter how doctored they are.
- Should typically use darker backgrounds + lighter text, which is less jarring to the eyes.

Fonts and Colors

- A single color change can be used for emphasis.
- Color changes draw the viewers' eyes; use wisely.
- Simple fonts, *please*.
- NO REASON FOR CAPS!
- Be wary of auto-font size adjustments.
- Force a font size limit, e.g., always >22-25 size font.
- Avoid green and cyan on white background. Define your own darker colors.

Equations and Numbers

- Typically no need to reproduce basic equations (e.g., the fluid equations)
- Highlight terms or entire equations that show what makes your work unique, exciting, and novel.
- If borrowing equations form papers, rip Vector Graphics or large Pixel Graphics.
- For Macs: Preview, LaTexIT, or Adobe can copy vector graphics.

Plots

- Tailor your own plots to look great on the screen.
- Use bigger fonts, bolder (and fewer) tick marks, thicker linestyles, etc.
- Can you use linestyles to differentiate curves rather than just colors?
- Label everything.
- Annotate and improve borrowed plots.
- Cover up data you don't need to reference.

Animations

- Should be instructive, not distracting or flashy.
- Use to build up an idea or concept (multiple plots appear individually , for example).
- Use to guide eyes towards the important ideas.
- Use to illustrate an idea or model.

Protanopia and Poor Projectors

- Protanopia is the most common form of color blindness: cannot distinguish reds and greens.
- Don't use only colors to indicate something specific.
- Desaturate your image and see if it still has impact.
- Use an online simulator or Adobe to proof your slides.

Afterwards: Question Taking

- Repeat the question for the audience (and yourself).
- Add background and context for questions.
- Don't assume that everyone knows more than you.
- A few moments of silence to think is OK.
- Take obnoxious and over-the-top questions offline.