Professor Robert Gilmore Pontius Jr (rpontius@clarku.edu) has compiled this list of ideas concerning how to make an effective oral presentation. He has generated these ideas after seeing, advising, and giving hundreds of presentations. You can download this file and many other papers at www.clarku.edu/~rpontius. This document was last updated on 27 April 2009.

PREPARATION
1. Most importantly, design the presentation so that it serves the audience. The quality of your presentation is measured by what the audience absorbs, not by how much you exude. The audience does not care about how hard you have worked or how much you know, they care about how much they can learn from you. If they learn one important idea in 20 minutes, then you have succeeded.
2. Your preparation should be good enough so that you can speak through your entire presentation from memory while getting dressed during the morning of the presentation.
3. Practice your presentation by yourself in a room several times, and then try it on your friends. Rehearse the clear presentation of each idea in the most appropriate sequence; do not attempt to repeat every word the same way every time.
4. Prepare sufficiently so that you do not need to read from any papers.
5. Take control of the physical environment of your presentation space. You should set the lighting, chairs, heat, etc. in order to enable you to communicate effectively and the audience to receive your message.
6. Give a written introduction to the person who will introduce you. This is a good way for the audience to learn about your credentials. It is more polite for your moderator to speak about your accomplishments, than for you to speak about your own accomplishments. Your introduction should convince your audience that they are about to hear a worthwhile presentation.
7. Make certain you test all audio visual equipment at least 1 hour before your presentation, preferably a day before your presentation.
8. Learn the name and location of the audio-visual person. You will need this quickly if you have equipment problems.
9. Your first slide should be on display when the audience enters the room and waits for the beginning time. The first slide should allow the audience to know whether they are in the correct room and should give them things that they can note while they are waiting, for example email addresses, URLs, etc.

CONTENT & QUANTITY
10. Use the well tested formula of: a) telling the audience what you will tell them, b) tell them it, and c) tell them what you told them. It is fine to have an identical slide of Major Points at the beginning and the end.
11. Tell your audience why your message is important early in the presentation.
12. Your presentation is an advertisement. You do not need to tell the audience everything. They probably do not want to know everything. If they want to know more, they will: ask questions, read your paper, or contact you directly.

13. You should never be in the position to say "I have too much information, so I'll just go really fast". You should edit your presentation such that it is digestible in the allocated duration.
14. It is your job to decide the one important message of your presentation and to deliver it. It is not your job to tell the audience how much you suffered to develop your ideas.

TIME MANAGEMENT
15. Running over time dooms any presentation. Running over time is disrespectful to others.
16. If your audience does not know the intended duration of your talk then allow your audience to know for how many minutes you plan to talk near the beginning of the talk.
17. It is good to present less information than what you have, in order to allow time for the audience to ask questions for additional depth into their interests.
18. Leave time for questions. Question and answers are usually the most important and satisfying of the talk because it allows your audience the opportunity to interact, which is important especially in the afternoon after lunch when nearly every person becomes drowsy.
19. Learn how to finish the presentation quickly. If your proctor says that there are only X more minutes, then finish within X minutes. If there is 1 minute left, go directly to your conclusions slide. If you must finish quickly, then there is no more time for additional ideas. Do not introduce new ideas with one minute left.
20. When presenting in a group, your actions influence the subsequent presentations. If you run over time, you will cause problems with your professional colleagues. Even when you are not presenting in a group, if you run overtime, you will cause problems with your audience members.

AUDIENCE MANAGEMENT
21. There is never a reason to tell the audience whether you are nervous or flustered. They expect that you are nervous. If you do not tell them that you are barely surviving the presentation psychologically, then they might never know, because you usually appear less nervous than you are.
22. If you are not nervous, then you are probably not taking the presentation seriously. If you do not take the presentation seriously, then you should not do it. If you do not take the presentation seriously, then you should not waste the audience's time. If the presentation is not worth doing well, then it is not worth doing. You should be both nervous and confident.
23. Every questioner is an angel, because there can be a valuable message in every question, no matter how nasty the question might seem at the time.
24. When entertaining questions, you should give a clear answer in the first 10 seconds of your response, then you can elaborate if necessary.
25. If you do not understand the question, then ask the questioner to clarify. Do not attempt to respond to a question that you do not understand.
26. If you do not know the answer to a question, then do not try to give the impression that you do. You should say something that saves face and compliments the

questioner, e.g. "this is an area that I need to consider, I hope that you will be able to send me some papers on the topic".

27. Keep it simple so that all audience members can understand, but let the audience know that the analysis goes much deeper and that you can elaborate if they have questions. Give a context that a generalist can follow.

28. Know your audience. Tell them what they do not know. Do not tell them what they already know. For example, if you have spent the last year in a cramped computer lab working with them, then they do not need to be told your name, hopefully.

29. Assume there is at least one person in the audience who is a step ahead of you, because it is probably the case. This will prevent you from being overconfident.

30. When presenting in a session, it is nice to refer the work of other people in the room.

31. Plant one well constructed piece of humor in your presentation, and practice the timing of the delivery of it.

32. Leave your audience an action to take at the end of the presentation. For example your last slide should give them a citation to read, a URL to visit, or your email address to write. Leave this last slide viewable while you entertain questions.

33. Your audience wants to applaud for you at the end. You should prompt them by ending by saying "Thank You". Then you should turn the stage beck to the moderator, who will determine whether there is time for questions. You should never end by saying "Any Questions?" because it creates an awkward moment when the audience does not know whether first to applaud or to ask questions.

LANGUAGE

34. Always state sentences first in the affirmative, then if necessary in the negative, e.g. state "My proposed method should be used … " as opposed to "Your common method should not be used". Notice that this entire list of suggestions is stated in terms of what to do, not what not to do.

35. Make the first words out of your mouth count. Plan a good attention-getter. "Good Morning" is bland. If you do not practice those first words, they will likely be "OK, so, …", which is a very weak beginning. It is never appropriate to say "Before I begin, …" because as soon as you step into the presentation space, you have begun, whether you like it or not.

36. Thank your host.

37. Use the word "random" to mean a carefully performed process whereby each object has the same probability of selection. Random refers to a very specific and particular structure. Random does not mean unstructured or haphazard; in fact random means just the opposite. If your method was haphazard, then it is not worth telling us about.

38. Avoid the word "just" because it destroys the power of all words near it in the sentence. Your audience reacts very differently if you say "This is my flow diagram" as opposed to "This is just my flow diagram". The latter wording is much weaker.

39. Put the word only at a place in the sentence near the word it modifies. For example, change "I only took five samples" to "I took only five samples" because only modifies the word "five", not the word "I" nor the word "took". Usually the word only can be eliminated. It is sufficient to say "I took five samples".

40. Know each term that you use in your presentation. You should be prepared to give a clear definition of every concept that you use in your presentation. If you can not explain a concept, then it should not be in your presentation.
41. Learn how to use a microphone. Adjust the position of the microphone so you speak directly into the microphone, since many microphones are unidirectional. Simply having the microphone nearby is not good enough. Test the microphone before the audience enters the room. If there are more than 100 people in the audience, or if the room is large, then use the microphone. Too many presenters do not use the available microphone because they think that their voices project better than their voices really do. They avoid microphones because they are not comfortable with microphones. You need to get comfortable. If you use a microphone, then you can use a calm voice. If you have a mobile microphone, then do not walk in front of the speaker, because it will blast your audience with feedback. Test this before the audience enters the room.

SLIDES & VISUALS
42. You PowerPoint file should be less than 10MB.
43. Carry your PowerPoint file on both CD and USB. Also put your PPT file on the web so you can download it while away from home and also so your audience can access it.
44. Use only regular alphanumeric characters in the file name. Do not use periods, spaces or punctuation. Some operating systems get confused from such file names. Hopefully, your file will be sent all over the world and used on many various computer platforms. Use your personal name as part of your file name so it is distinct in group presentations. Many other people will use the name "PresentationFinal.ppt".
45. Your first slide should be a title slide with your: title, name, contact information, institutions, and funders.
46. Your second slide should give your main points. This slide is the important step of "telling the audience what you will to tell them".
47. Every slide should be important. If it is not important, then remove it.
48. Your third to last slide should state your agenda to improve what you have just presented. You should list these in order of importance. Any analysis has an infinite number of ways it can be improved. You should know the relative importance of each one. This slide can trump any one who is planning an aggressive question, because such as slide is a pre-emptive way of saying "I have already thought about that."
49. The last (or second to last) slide should be the Major Points or Conclusions. Never have more than one slide after your Conclusions. The conclusions slide should appear within a minute of the end of the presentation. The conclusions slide is a strong signal to the audience that you are ending. It is rude to continue for several minutes after your last conclusions slide. Have only one conclusions slide of only your most important conclusions.
50. If you have a slide after the conclusions slide, then it should be the slide that you show while responding to questions. It should give acknowledgements and tell the audience important information that they can act on, for example a URL that they should click for more information.
51. Put logos of acknowledgements on the first and last slides. Give acknowledgements to monetary funders, data suppliers, supporting institutions and sundry volunteers.

52. Give sources of all information in a small caption at the bottom of the appropriate slide.
53. Put automatic slide numbers on the lower right of each slide. These will allow your audience to ask specific questions about specific slides.
54. Use animation and sound only if it conveys information. Animation and videos frequently fail, especially when you are asked to use a different machine at the last minute.
55. Avoid animation because it makes it extremely difficult to backtrack quickly through slides.
56. Do not use the PowerPoint timing feature. It is too easy to save accidentally the feature that automatically clicks through the slides.
57. For maps, use a scale bar because it changes scale appropriately where ever it is projected. A scale ratio (e.g. 1:1000) makes sense for only maps that are printed on paper, because the size of the paper never changes. All map graphics should have the ratio of height to width locked.
58. The font should be large enough to be read from anywhere in the room. If the font is too small then you should enlarge it or eliminate it. You should never be in the position to say "I know you can not read the slide".
59. Let each slide communicate through an effectively constructed figure. If you do this, then your slides will prompt your memory when nervousness interferes with memory.
60. Each slide should be constructed so that the presenter could say "This slide shows that …" as soon as the slide appears.
61. Every bit of ink on the figure should communicate information. If ink does not communicate important information, then eliminate it.
62. Present quantitative information as figures rather than tables of numbers.
63. Numbers are usually important in only the first or second significant digit, so you should present only one or two significant digits. If you need to look at the fourth digit to see differences among numbers then the differences are usually not very important.
64. When explaining a plotted figure, first define the axes.
65. Use either black font on white background or light font on dark background.
66. Every projector is slightly different, so the less complicated the PowerPoint file, the fewer problems you will have when you are asked to use an unfamiliar projector.
67. Use color to communicate information. Use pure colors, meaning that each of the Red, Green or Blue guns should be set to either 100% or 0%. Since every projector is slightly different, color mixtures usually display in surprising and disappointing ways on various projectors.
68. Use grammatically correct short complete sentences, so that someone who sees the slides can read them coherently, even if you were to email the slides to them.
69. If you use bullets, then each bullet should be of the same grammatical form (e.g. all nouns or all actions). In other words, if you use bullets, then practice good parallelism.
70. Use less than 20 words per slide.
71. Be prepared to have the audiovisual equipment fail. If it does, get someone else to fix it while you go on with material related to what you are presenting. Just because the equipment fails for you, does not entitle you to take minutes from the next presenter's

presentation. Also, equipment failure does not entitle you to waste the audience's time. Ultimately, it is your show and you are must be responsible for and deal with everything that happens, even if you are not in control of everything that happens.

TANGIBLES

72. Let your level of dress reflect how much you respect your own presentation and how much you respect your audience. Dress matters, even for academics.
73. You can not make up for lack of preparation by over dressing.
74. Bring your own water and have it nearby, with a closed lid. You are likely to get dry mouth while you are talking, especially if you are very nervous. Even if you never get thirsty, you can use the water when you lose you train of thought. If your mind goes blank, step back, get your water, take a deep breath, and drink the water, while you are gathering your thoughts. This moment will allow the audience to digest what you have been saying, and will allow you to recover in dignity, while putting your audience at ease.
75. Smile and make the presentation enjoyable. Just because it's science, does not mean you need to be cold. The more you enjoy it, the more your audience will enjoy it.
76. After every presentation, read this list to give yourself an evaluation with the goal of improvement for next time. Be aware of what you did well, so you will do it again next time.