

How Real Scientists Give Talks

By Jay D. Mann (ca. 1985), updated by Keith R. Sharrock (1998)

1. Real Scientists don't have to rehearse their talk.

Spontaneity is more important than fitting into the allocated timeslot. Imagine the air of excitement that fills the audience when a talk has reached the 15-minute mark without getting past the introduction. Real scientists are not dissuaded from thorough exploration of their data and its implications by the antics of the chairman, the fidgeting of later speakers, and the stomach rumbles of the audience.

2. Real Scientists keep the white-board well informed.

Facing the screen or the board helps them to remember what they did. There is no need to raise one's voice or turn around: the board is close and has no difficulty in hearing one. Some Real Scientists prefer to talk to their manuscript. This is risky since acute listeners in the front row might catch a few words.

3. Real Scientists don't label the axes of their slides.

It is perfectly obvious what both axes mean, and in any case they can give the description verbally. (Using the terms "abscissa" and "ordinate", so that by the time the listeners recall which is which, they've missed the rest of the statement.)

4. Real Scientists don't label any lines on their slides.

They put four or five curves onto one slide, and wave one hand vaguely at the slide while stating, "This shows the effects of all the treatments on a test preparation type 3."

5. Real Scientists don't have to summarise their results. The cosmic significance of a 12.8% response was covered in the introduction. The time gained by not summarising is better utilised in describing the precise composition of the buffers.

6. Real Scientists don't give introductions either.

If the audience knows about the field of research, they don't need any introduction, and if they don't know the field the speaker should not waste his time informing them.

7. Real Scientists have at least 30 slides for a 15-minute talk.

8. Real Scientists have no slides at all, and draw everything freehand on the white-board.

In such cases, no reasonable person could expect them to label axes or lines.

9. Real Scientists know that the audience remembers everything they described at last year's meeting.

It is pointless to repeat slides or summaries already given 12 months previously. "You will immediately note how different this result is from that which I presented in Figure 18 of last year's talk."

10. Real Scientists present all their data.

To ensure that no one misses anything, they both point to and read off every line in every table in every slide. It would be insulting to the audience merely to indicate the most important bits.

11. Real Scientists have their own laser pointers.

The mark of a Real Scientist is the laser pointer protruding from the top pocket. Although generally recognised as nervousness monitors, the more powerful models can also be used to discipline a day~ projectionist, or to quell any further questions.

12. Real Scientists make full use of the latest multi-media presentation aids

From the opening fanfare as the title explodes onto the screen until the final acknowledgments sink slowly into the sunset, the audience will be captivated by a professionally prepared multimedia presentation. The presenter has only to mouth the words and to casually click the mouse button, knowing that nothing can go wrong and the timing will be perfect.

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