

The Ten Commandments for How to Give a Seminar

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Commandment #1

Prepare extremely well for the presentation

- Give many «practice job talks»
- Go carefully over the slides with advisor, fellow PhD students ...
- Know your paper!
 - ... there may be forgiveness for not knowing the literature or not knowing some facts. But there is no forgiveness for not understanding your own paper
- Job talk: Recall that people want to hire you because you will be a good colleague, not because the job-market paper may be published well

Commandment #2 (intro)

State the question you are asking

- Easier to understand a paper if one understands the purpose of paper
- Audience can anticipate direction

Commandment #3 (intro)

Link motivation/introduction tightly
to what the paper actually achieves

- You will be held accountable for everything you say in the introduction
- Don't be tempted to motivate paper with issues you don't address
- An example can be extremely useful. But it has to fit like hand in glove with the model and/or analysis
- Audience wants to understand your paper. Don't confuse them!

Commandment #4 (intro and main body)

Convey main value added of your paper

- ... i.e., clarify your main contribution
- Easier for audience to evaluate your paper and understand emphasis in presentation (models, data, ...)
- Throughout: Emphasize when you build on other people's work/models/methodologies and when you get to what is novel in your analysis

Commandment #5 (intro)

Keep literature review short and to-the-point

- Purpose of literature review is to place paper relative to the literature (and to convey the value added relative to other papers)
- Audience wants to understand *your* paper, and are not interested in a lecture about the literature in general
- No need to explain other papers in detail (unless needed to motivate your paper)

Commandment #6 (intro and main body)

Every slide must have a purpose

- Audience expects a clear plan for the presentation, where every sentence, figure, and table has a distinct purpose
- If purpose of a slide is unclear, audience will be confused and start asking for clarification

Commandment #7 (main body)

Convey what makes the model tick
... or, if empirical paper, what identifies main findings

- Most important commandment!
- «Success» is that the audience understands the main mechanism
... they will remember the paper only if they understand the logic of how the main result comes about

Commandment #8

Keep the pace!

- You are the manager of the talk
- Do not waste time
 - It's very sad not to have time to explain the main result/finding
- Introduction is a potential quicksand ... don't get stuck!
- Keep track of time and cut less relevant stuff if time is running short

Commandment #9 (main body)

Do not cover too much material

- Less is more
- Focus on covering the main point and main value added
 - ... and make sure people get the main point
- Do not cram in too much material in the talk
 - You do not have to go through everything you have done

Commandment #10

Answer questions well

- Let people finish the question (instead of guessing what they will ask)
- Different types of questions:
 1. **Clarifying question:** answer precisely and move on (quickly)
 2. **Questions about main mechanism / analysis:** must answer well!
 3. **Speculative questions** a la «what if you wrote a different model»
... you may defer such questions until afterwards.
Dangerous to speculate/guess!
 4. **Deadly questions** («I doubt your main finding/mechanism»). You must fight back.
- Questions can be extremely useful for later, but are easy to forget. Have someone write down the questions