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
- Recall: at a job talk, 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