20 TIPS ON GIVING A 20 MINUTE TALK

A. GIBNEY

(1) Think carefully about your title and abstract, which set the stage for your talk.

(2) In a 20 minute talk, if you are going to speak about a technical subject, consider using slides.

(3) If you do opt for a chalk talk, make sure to write legibly.

(4) Whether using slides or the board, avoid technical terms, and rather give simple examples.

(5) You should spend considerable time at the beginning to motivate your problem: Why is it interesting? Why is this the problem? Emphasize why and how what you are saying is important.

(6) If you are giving a general audience talk, then don't expect that your audience knows anything about what you are talking about. Don't put your audience on the spot. Your goal is to be inclusive: You fail if you make anybody in the audience feel intimidated.

(7) Better not to expect your audience to know anything.

(8) If you are going to present a particularly technical theorem, consider instead explaining a special case or giving an example.

(9) Give accurate references to the authors of the theorems you cite, and the year the results appeared. This helps to put your work into perspective.

(10) Plan your time so that your talk is not too long: Do not be forced to go overtime, or to zip through your slides too quickly.

(11) Avoid having too much information on each slide.

(12) Clear and understandable mini-proofs built into talk are a good thing. Cut down on the technical details, and opt instead for heuristic explanations and good illustrative examples.

(13) If you are using slides, do a spell check.

(14) Speak loudly and clearly so the people in the back can hear what you are saying.

(15) Make eye contact with your audience.

(16) Explaining things in simple terms.

(17) Mention applications.

(18) Try to include pictures.

(19) If you can, cite somebody who is in the audience.

(20) Use the space in front of the room to keep people awake: move around, make eye contact, engage the audience with hand gestures, and use an adjacent board if available.