

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

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 of the 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
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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 #10

Answer questions well

- Let people finish the question (instead of guessing what they will ask)
- Different types of questions:

• Direct questions: answer precisely and move on (quickly)

• Indirect questions: must answer well!

• Hypothetical questions: a la «what if you wrote a different model»

• Speculative questions: ... you may defer such questions until afterwards

Dangerous to speculate/guess

(«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