Developing (and Delivering) a Great Scientific Presentation

1) OUTLINE: While there is no need to include an outline in your actual presentation, it is often very helpful to sketch out a general outline of your talk. This will help you organize your thoughts, pick the elements you’d like to include in your talk, and provide you with an overview of how you intend to knit your points together into a cohesive story.

2) AUDIENCE: Pay attention to your target audience when preparing your presentation. Your audience is intelligent and educated in marine science, but they may be completely unfamiliar with your particular topic.

3) VISUAL APPEAL: Make sure your slides contain a good balance between information and visual appeal. Scientific presentations can easily become dull if you focus too much on dry data, plots, and text. Your slides should contain just enough text/data to get your point across, but make sure you provide visual interest to each slide as well (photographs, full-color plots, multimedia when appropriate).

4) VISUAL FORMAT: If you choose to use PowerPoint, pay close attention to the format of your slides and your slide transitions. Be careful that you:

- Don’t “over-text” your slides; keep the text brief (key phrases & bullet points)
- Don’t drown your slides with too many graphics, as they too can be distracting
- Don’t make your font style too flourished or your font size too small
- Don’t pick obnoxious color combos in your text or in the background
- Don’t pick busy graphics as your backgrounds
- Don’t use excessive text animations or too many fancy slide transitions

The basics of speaking are, for the most part, consistent across disciplines. Knowing the expectations of a discipline is an important part of adapting to your audience, however. The papers in the “Speaking, in my opinion…” series do not represent an official statement from the department. They do, however, give you an introduction to different faculty opinions on effective speaking.
5) COMPATIBILITY: Make sure you test your ENTIRE slide presentation on the PPT version and platform (Apple vs PC) on which your presentation will be delivered.

6) DELIVERY: Talk to your audience, not to the screen. Be sure to scan the room and make eye contact with your audience, and never read your presentation from the screen.

7) IMPACT: Focus on developing a talk that is informative AND entertaining (or at least attention-getting). Try to think of unusual ways to present your information in a way which commands and maintains the attention of your audience.

8) PRACTICE: You may wish to practice your delivery on friends or family – this is a great way to hone your delivery (are you talking too fast/slow? Too loud/soft?), but it’ll do wonders to give your confidence when you deliver your presentation in class (helps to beat the jitters).

9) DEMEANOR: If you appear professional and confident when you deliver your presentation, the audience will grant you greater credibility. Remember: you know your topic