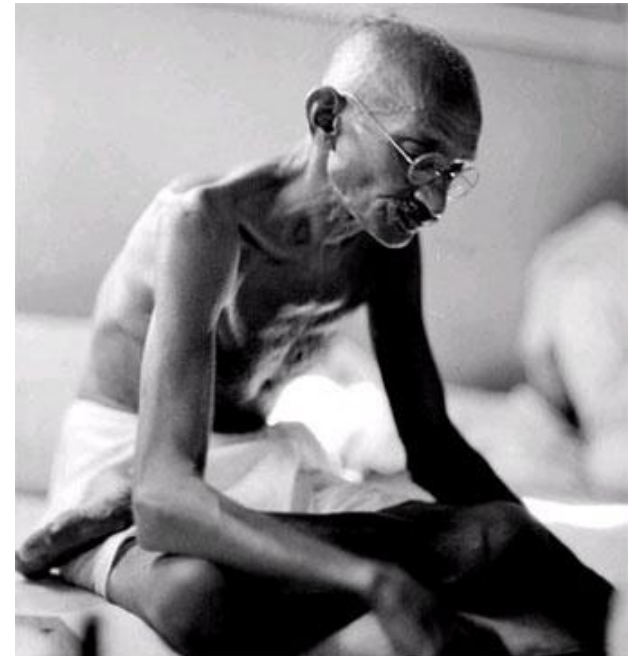# Giving Good Talks

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This talk evolved from "On How to Talk", by Mihai Budiu, CMU,
a presentation of April 2004 found at www.cs.cmu.edu/~mihaib/talk-talk.ppt

Have Something
Interesting to Say

~~Bull~~

It's **impossible** to give a good talk otherwise!

Know Your Audience!

Very different to talk to:
- a gathering of specialists
- a gathering of smart non-specialists
- a classroom lecture
- a group of gifted HS students
- …

An Important Obligation

Don't waste your audiences time

Entails:

- having something to say & knowing your audience

- organize, organize, organize

- practice, practice, practice

Don't Put **Too Much** on a Slide

Your audience should be **listening to you**,
not **reading your slides**

More **Pictures**,   Fewer Words

When you write too many words, like this, your audience is going to be busy reading your words, and not listening to you. Since talks are almost never comprehensible from slides alone, an audience member that tries to read long slides and not attend to the speaker is sure to miss what is being said, lose interest, and zone out. The talk will completely fail. So think of words on the slide as things to look at and not as things which, by themselves, get across much of the semantics. As the words have now been reduced (or elevated) to visual artifacts, make sure that they are pretty and do exactly what you want. An endless stream of them, like this does nothing to make a talk interesting and impactful. Pretend that words are expensive, each one costing you a dollar. In such a world, you are unlikely to use too many. Perhaps the worst talk I ever saw was a French cryptographer who somehow had the impression that you could give a talk by copying key paragraphs from your paper onto the slides and reading them to the audience (and, to make things even worse, in a terrible monotone voice). Each slide had hundreds of words, symbols, and formulas – so much that it actually seemed like a joke. But after 25 minutes, it was not a funny joke. Make sure this is one mistake you never make;

Don't Let PowerPoint Shape Your Talk

- An awful lot of talks look like
- A title and then
- A bulleted list of sentences, all
- In Arial font.
- It looks this way because PowerPoint makes
- This kind of thing easier than anything else.
- But rarely does a bulleted list
- Conform to what you have to say,
- Talks of black-and-white, bulleted-list slides
- Are among the most boring you'll ever see.

Stupid PowerPoint "Themes"

ALSO AVOID

- Distracting effects
- *Random colors*
- Lots of colors,
- *Lots* of **fonts**
- Inconsistent spacing and punctuation.
- Inadequate contrast
- <18pt fonts

Yes, I do believe I <u>am</u> the Most Annoying Slide in Human History!!

A good Paper …

and a good Talk on it

are very different.

Introductions

are important

What's the **contribution**
What's the **context**

Conclusions

are not important

But when you **do** include
one, it should
say something new –
Not a summary

Credit Anything That's Not Yours

- Ideas
- Data
- Quotes
- Significant illustrations
- Important pictures

Handling Questions

Listen carefully.

   Repeat the question.

      Think.

         Succinctly answer (what was actually asked).

Absolute Rules

are impossible in this domain

What works well in a talks is
highly variable and **difficult to find**

Warning: preparing a good talk is **very** time-consuming