Golden Rules modified from Marc Hauser and others

A. Talk content:

1. Start out simply. Tell a story that anyone in the audience can understand. Link some of the main problems into an opening line that will capture the problem, something vivid, memorable.

2. Tell the audience what the general problem or problems are. Although some members of the audience will be familiar with your work, many will not and will need some help. They are smart, but you need to tell them why you think you have an interesting problem and why they should care.

3. Give the audience a road map. Tell them what you are going to tell them.

4. Summarize main points along the way. Don't assume they have followed everything you have said. If you have structure to your talk, then you can summarize at the key junctures. Give sound bites and take home messages.

5. Anticipate questions by being explicit about the kinds of things that are weak in your analyses or things that are incomplete that you are working on. By being humble about your work, you will fend off rude questions from the audience.

6. Think about who you are talking to. Try to work out ways to engage the audience members. Chances are, you will be talking to a diversity of people. There are always things you can say to engage people outside of your core area.

7. When you are talking to a broad audience, you will want to move more slowly through the material because you can't assume that everyone will know the jargon or be able to read your data slides with the same level of efficiency as an expert. Walk people through the slides. This takes time. Plan accordingly.

8. It is always best to give a talk without having to read the material. If you need to use notes, then make sure that you can readily see them.

9. Conclude your talk by reviewing the main points. If possible, come back to your opening story and link up with the material you presented. I like to leave off with potential future directions. And remind audience of the important themes or ideas to emerge from your work.

B. Technical details pertaining to slides, video, audio:

1. Use large fonts for your slides. I never use anything less than 24 pt. and use 36pt for titles. I like fonts such as Helvetica or Verdana. They are clean fonts. These are guidelines that will serve you well for any kind of auditorium. In general, bigger fonts are better, and less material per slide is better as well.

2. Red is a terrible color for text. It is fine for lines on a regression. Use dark colors for fonts. Don't use a lot of colors --- it is very distracting. Basically,there are two ways to color a slide: dark fonts on white/light gray background, or light font colors on dark blue/black backgrounds. If you like light on dark, then don't use red or blue as font colors as they are impossible to read.
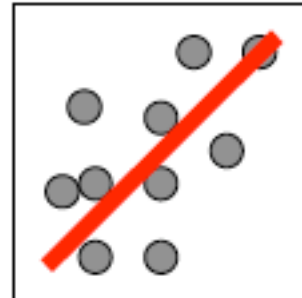
3. Walk the audience through your slides. Tell them what the axes are, what the variables are and the measurement units.

4. Don't put more on your figures then you need. If you have a table, you should only present the material that the audience needs to see. Large tables with lots of information, but only one relevant row, are disasters. If you have a regression with lots of data points, but the regression line is the key piece, put the data points in a dark color, and the line in a bright colorful one. For example, put the data points in black and the line in red. This will automatically grab the audience, and have them attend to the key piece – the line.

5. For slides with text, keep the amount of text to a minimum. It is better to have more slides with less text than fewer slides with more text.

6. When axes have numbers, put the fewest labels possible. Remember that a figure on a slide is different from a figure in a paper. If, for example, you have a y-axis with percentages, all you need is 0% and 100%; show the gradations in between with tick marks.

7. If you are presenting audio or video material, add on at least 3-5 minutes more than you have planned because things always take a bit longer.

8. The challenge for all speakers is finishing on time. This means allocating an appropriate number of slides. For a 50 min talk, somewhere between 45-50

slides is about right. Remember, some of your slides will be simple pictures that enable you to make a simple point effectively, while other slides include data or methods and thus, require careful discussion. Remember that your audience has never seen your slides and thus, will need to orient. If it is a data slide, use a laser pointer to orient your audience. For slides with text and multiple points, I like to take advantage of powerpoint to introduce each point sequentially, and then gray out prior points. This allows audience to follow the point that you are currently focused on without being distracted by the other points on the slide.

9. Powerpoint can be dangerous! Don't use all the bells and whistles. Don't have your text animate in with flying titles or characters that drop out of heaven or rise from hell. This is unnecessary. Don't use complicated backgrounds or borders. In general, use naked slides: the only thing on your slide should be information that you plan on discussing.

C. Planning your Presentation: Communicate Clearly.

The power of public speaking rests in both effective organization and clarity. These elements are also essential when creating PowerPoint presentations.

1. **Remain succinct:** PowerPoint inherently is a device for communicating concisely. Be direct with your content. Writing 20 word paragraphs on a slide defeats your objective.

2. **Don't overload:** Packing too much content in a single slide could be confusing. Consider increasing the number of slides.

3. **Make your slides count:** Is the slide necessary? If not, omit it or combine it with another slide.

4. **Maintain depth**: Due to the nature of the media, it's easy to resort to citing facts. However, are you also providing interpretation? Let PowerPoint assist you in conveying complex ideas to your audience.