

Notes on 'Grab 'em by the throat: How to give a great oral presentation'

Robert Dickson

What's wrong with most lectures?

- Lack of **empathy**: failure to imagine the experience of the lecture from the audience's perspective
- Lack of **synthesis**: mere reporting of data without meaningful interpretation
- Lack of **preparation**: little thought or time given to optimizing presentation

Grab 'em by the throat:

- The **stakes**: why this matters *to your audience*
- The **crisis**: the problem that you're going to remedy
- The **fix**: how you're going to resolve the crisis in your talk

Three compelling story structures (from Little 2016):

- **Story A**: Facts about the world; existing work explains it poorly; we explain it better.
- **Story B**: Topic is heavily studied; but something is missing or wrong; we fill that gap.
- **Story C**: Theories and facts seem contradictory; we resolve the contradiction.

Advice on using PowerPoint:

- Teach more by teaching less: prune slides to a single coherent point.
- Stop dividing the audience's attention: don't display text you don't want the audience to read.
- Avoid the passive voice trap.
- Be concrete with your slide title.
- Use hierarchies coherently.
- Use light text on a dark background.
- Use a small number of themed colors.
- Use a sans serif font (Arial, Helvetica, Gill Sans, etc.).
- Never use Comic Sans.
- Use animations to control your audience's attention.
- Consider avoiding bullet lists altogether.
- Use coherent heuristics.

Further resources on effective communication:

- *Trees, Maps, and Theorems* by Jean-luc Doumont: phenomenal book on clarity in communication (writing, presentations, figures); Doumont speaks at UM every fall, well worth attending.
- *The Sense of Style* by Steven Pinker: thoughtful and practical "style guide" on writing by a lucid cognitive scientist
- *Authority and American Usage* by David Foster Wallace: wonderful essay on code-switching and adaptive grammar
- *The Visual Display of Quantitative Information* and *The Cognitive Style of PowerPoint* by Edward Tufte: seminal books on achieving clarity via data visualization (and obscuring it via PowerPoint)

Further resources on effective storytelling:

- *Three Templates for Introductions to Political Science Articles* by Andrew Little: www.andrewtlittle.com/papers/little_intros.pdf
- *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* by Joseph Campbell
- *Story* by Robert McKee
- *Aaron Sorkin Teaches Screenwriting*: www.masterclass.com/classes

Further resources for choosing color palettes:

- *ColorBrewer*: colorbrewer2.org/
- *Pictalicious.com*: make a palette from a photograph:
- *Wes Anderson palettes*: wesandersonpalettes.tumblr.com/

- Use vivid, self-explanatory figures to improve clarity.
- Don't use unnecessary animations.
- Don't use unnecessary clip art.
- Show radiology images on a black background.
- End strong by bringing it home.
- Consider a handout.
- Invest in a laser pointer/slide advancer.
- Bring your own laptop and adapter.
- Show up early, run through your slides.
- Practice! Time yourself.