

# Why Should I Give a Talk

## Why Exactly

1. **Improve your presentation skills.** Maybe you speak too quickly, or maybe your blackboard usage is all over the place. Things like these can be very difficult to realize without practicing and someone pointing them out to you. And the first step to fixing a problem is recognizing it.
2. **Evaluate your knowledge.** Giving a talk in front of a group does wonders to clear holes in your understanding on the subject - since somebody will almost always point out if you're speaking nonsense without realizing. But it's also almost always the case that the discussion that follows will fill the hole.
3. **Learn something new.** *Particularly if you're a physics major,* you don't want to graduate only knowing what was taught in the class. Seriously. At this point, everybody needs to distinguish themselves somewhat in terms of what they know. Otherwise we're all carbon copies of one another, and conversations become dull.
4. **Eliminate stage freight.**
5. **It's fun.** You get to talk on a subject you like, and we're all there for you willing to stick with your for hours on end and listen to you present! Can it get any better?

## Stumped? Here's a Cookbook Recipe for Giving a Talk

1. **Go to the library (or your favorite resource) and start browsing.**
2. **Pick up a book with an interesting title.** Check its table of content to see if the book is heading towards what's interesting to you. Skim over the first few pages to see if it's at all comprehensible. If it isn't, leave it and go back to step 1. Otherwise, pick it up and continue.
3. **Immediately add yourself to the list (2018 - 2019), as "In progress".** You might start thinking that you don't have time to do it. Don't think. Just act. Worrying is for cowards. Trust me: it will work in the end 😊 (As a bonus step: state a date you'd like to give your talk at by informing me or other members)
4. **Start reading and preparing in whatever idle time you find.** Now that you've committed, discover your potential in finding "free time" in what you thought was vacuum, just like how you can always fit one more sheet of paper in a "full" file.
5. **Once you're ready, move your entry in the list (2018 - 2019) to "Talks ready to be presented", and wait your turn.** If there's somebody before you, you can contact them if you'd like to give your talk first (they might end up being grateful for that, as they themselves might find that they need more time to prepare). I'll also contact you.
6. **Promote your talk.** Give a title for your talk. Tell people about it. Consider writing a little introduction email on your topic, and spread it via the physics society mailing list. Consider even putting up a new page here on the teamwork space with an introduction or summary and linking to resources used in preparation for your talk.

**Note:** The length of the talk should be between 15 minutes and 1 hour and 30 minutes (count a 5-10 minute break in between every hour) depending on the nature of the topic and how deep you would like to go. If you need more than that, then the talk should be divided into two parts in two meetings.

**Note:** One always underestimates the amount of time needed for the talk, so put that in mind. If you think you have prepared material for 40 minutes, you'll probably be using an hour.

## Useful Links

- [How to Make Sure Your Talk Doesn't Suck](#) by David Tong. Originally written for Physics PhDs. But applies all the same here!
- [Improving presentation style](#) - The "Effective Use of the Chalkboard" section in particular is very nice.
- [Advice for students](#). Page 10, section 8 "Presentation Tips"; Professor Florian Rabe's amazing writeup for students. He's a CS professor, but the advice presented here is general and applies to everybody.

## On the Pressure of Giving a Talk

One common thing that gets brought up when I pester colleagues to give talks is the pressure of vigorous questioning from the audience. Imagine the contrary: Everybody is just sitting there and you think they're listening. By the end of it all, you're not sure if anybody understood anything. You're not even sure if you've left any impression. Questions are indicative that people are actually following and/or trying to follow. If it turned out that you actually did a mistake or had a misconception, then so much the better! Conversely, if you're not getting any questions, that probably means nobody is following. Learning to receive criticism well is difficult but is a part of growing up (I admit to be the first one not to take criticism so well, but I'm working on it!).

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