

Abstract: A picture can be worth a thousand words. This presentation is about how to make your presentation worth more than three. This one-hour talk presents ideas from Edward Tufte, Damian Conway, and Colin Powell. You'll become a more critical consumer of visualizations of data via the web and in print. The heart of the talk is tailored to the needs of coders presenting code, and will include my best presentation secret weapon.

Here is a great formula for preparing and giving a great presentation:

1. Make a supergraphic of your data or architecture. This is a handout at high resolution; not a slide at low information transfer rate. Strive for at least the information density of the sports statistics page.
2. Write three paragraphs on the back with your main points in prose. Do not use bullets. Prefer communicating at the level of technical and academic whitepapers, over Dick and Jane stories.
3. Arrive early, and check the environment. If you arrive early, something good will happen.
4. Have a reading period for attendees to view your handouts at maximum information transfer rates. It also gracefully handles late arrivals.
5. Be introduced by a respected peer. Politeness will force them to applaud, which will subconsciously make them more receptive and enthusiastic about your talk.
6. Use a *minimum* of slides for your narrative arc. If you need a formula for the arc of the presentation, try a: Problem → Relevance → Solution ...or... Say It → Say It In Depth → Say It Again formula.
7. Avoid repeated elements on slides; delete slides altogether if you can. The visual cortex processes far faster than auditory information, so any slide risks focusing your audience away from what you intend to convey. Distracting pictures will distract your audience.
8. For presenting code, setup a consistent template with monospace, indenting, and code-coloring. Prefer “blink” difference between slides over side-by-side or same-slide code to highlight the code you want. For complex examples, use your editor, IDE or script a demo.
9. Take (or give) questions. Repeat the question before answering. Feel free to answer “I don’t know”. If the guy in the second row threatens to monopolize questions, gracefully go to another questioner.
10. End early. It will be appreciated.

Further Reading:

The Visual Display of Quantitative Information (2001), Visual Explanations (1997), Envisioning Information (1990), Beautiful Evidence (2006) Edward Tufte.

Edward Tufte <http://tufte.com> Excellent discussion forum section at <http://tufte.com/bboard>

Study of a Numerically Modeled Severe Storm: http://redrock.ncsa.illinois.edu/AOS/image_89video.html

The PowerPoint Ranger <http://www.pptclasses.com/pptranger/>

The Cognitive Style of PowerPoint: Pitching Out Corrupts Within. Edward Tufte.

Laws That Choke Creativity, Lawrence Lessig, TED 2007.

http://www.ted.com/index.php/talks/larry_lessig_says_the_law_is_strangling_creativity.html

Identity 2.0 <http://identity20.com/media/OSCON2005/> Dick Hardt, SXIP, OSCON 2005 Keynote

GOOD / transparency <http://www.good.is/departments/transparency> Graphical explorations of the world around us.

The Onion <http://theonion.com> Statshot Feature

Senseable City Lab <http://senseable.mit.edu> (Obama | One People project)