Presentation Hints

(Copied from a variety of others and my own experience)

1. Communicate your message. Perception is the only reality.
2. The Golden Rule: Talk unto others as you would have them talk unto you.
3. PowerPoint’s (or other slides) are used to convey information efficiently. Even those of us who don’t teach with them use PowerPoint for conference presentations.
4. Don’t put too many words on a single slide. Give main points on the slide that you flesh out with verbal narration.
5. Don’t read the slides to the audience. Don’t turn your back to the audience to read your slides.
6. Use multimedia effects sparingly, to accent the most important points and create a memorable moment.
7. Use the same colors and fonts throughout a presentation. PowerPoint is great for this.
8. Practice, practice, practice so that you know you will be within the time limit and you can relax knowing how you will express your thoughts. Practicing with your slides helps you know if you have enough information on the slides (so you don’t forget something important) or too much detail (so you get side-tracked explaining a slide). Practice in front of others - at your research group meeting, for example. They can tell you what parts are confusing. Don’t talk without rehearsing. (Even Seinfeld rehearses, and he has nothing to say.)

Some people prepare extra slides or materials that can be used if time allows, but aren’t essential. Sometimes this works well, particularly in a long, open ended presentation (like a defense).

9. When you’ve been assigned a room and a time slot, inquire about the available equipment, outlets, and connections. Check out the room before your presentation. Make sure the room has everything that you need and make sure the presentation works on the screen. If possible go up the day before - or at least an hour beforehand. This will avoid any nasty surprises on the big day.

10. Sod’s law states that "If it can go wrong, it usually will". Be prepared. Have a back up plan. If you have your presentation on a laptop, back it up on a CD ROM and carry a hard copy with you. Take a spare power lead. Plan what to do if the projector breaks down.
   a. If you don’t know in advance what formats will be available, make Zip, CD, and/or online versions of your presentation, and a Pack-and-Go version, as well as handouts. I always feel a little “hyper” about bringing my presentation in so many forms. I have never needed to use one of my extra copies, but I never regretted having extras.
   b. Don’t rely on online versions, since connections can be slow or down, but an online version (available from your web page) is great if you lose your presentation on the plane and have time to recover it.
11. Use positive body language when speaking
   a. The eyes have it. Maintain good eye contact with the audience. Don’t keep contact with only one group of the audience. Spread your attention around the room. If you make eye contact with someone you know or have spoken to before the presentation, they're likely to smile back at you. Their smile will influence the rest of the audience.
   b. Don’t lock your knees. When you get to the lectern, unlock your knees and act as if you were about to catch a ball. It will relax you and make it all flow much more smoothly.
   c. Stand up straight; look confident, but relaxed. Do not show fear. Do not call attention to your nervousness. Many times when people say, “I am so nervous” I hadn’t even noticed. I always talk fast. It isn’t necessarily a nervous trait. I just think they are excited about their message. If you are prone to the "body blush" when nervous, wear clothing to cover up.
   d. Relax your arms to indicate openness
   e. Talk with your hands to indicate involvement, openness, and excitement
   f. Nod
   g. MOVE! Whenever you are presenting make sure you move. Animation helps your audience and it helps you. Movement stops your muscles from tensing and also puts extra air into your lungs. When you move you relax. When you relax you perform better. So don’t be static, get moving!
   h. When you ask questions, listen actively to the answers. Repeat/rephrase audience responses
      i. Helps everyone hear what is said
      ii. Reinforces that you are hearing and listening
12. Avoid negative body language when speaking
   a. Running your fingers through your hair or twisting hair
   b. Putting hands in pockets or behind your back
   c. Nervous habits such as saying “you know” or “ummm”. If this is a problem for you, have a friend volunteer to hit you each time you fall into such habits.
   d. Slouching Yawning Fidgeting Crossing arms
13. Fonts
   a. Try to avoid using more than two different fonts on a slide during a presentation. Too many fonts can start to make a slide look cluttered.
   b. Italicized fonts, Old English Fonts, and fancy or flowery fonts can detract from the viewer's reading ability and sense of space
   c. Verdana is a great title font. Arial or Tahoma are very clear for use in presentations. Comic Sans MS can work if you want to be lighthearted but can show signs of insecurity. Avoid "Times New Roman" - this is best for printed paragraphs.
14. Colors. Avoid red and blue mixtures of background and fonts. Dark backgrounds and light fonts project well
15. Produce an unusual statistic. It could help build some connection with the audience. I love the one by Vic Reeves - 93.7% of statistics are made up on the spot. Radio shows are filled with "strange but almost true" quotations.
16. Live with the fear. All presenters end up very nervous before a presentation. Learn how to harness it, just like an athlete has to. It happens to the best of us.

17. Clean your shoes. You will be on display. Your audience will be looking at how well you are turned out. They will look at your shoes. Make sure that you have cleaned them.

18. A picture is worth a thousand words. Use pictures instead of bullet points and your message retention should increase. Research suggests that this increase could be by a factor of five.

19. Avoid the jargon. People really do play buzzword bingo. Whether it the "TLA" - Three Letter Abbreviation or the "Paradigm Shift" you don’t want the audience to be scoring points at your expense. Don’t use abbreviations without defining them. (This is not the government.)

20. Involve the audience. "Tell me and I will forget, Show me and I will remember, Involve me and I will understand". Make the presentation interactive - if you can.

21. KISS. Keep It Simple Stupid. Reduce your presentation to simple concepts and your audience should be able to follow you. If you go beyond their understanding, they will switch off.

22. Always leave handouts. You have gone to a lot of effort to produce your presentation. Leaving handouts will reinforce your messages, and will help them to remember your presentation when they look at them again. Always include your contact details so that the audience can contact you. (This is an especially good idea if you are giving a poster session.)

23. Memorize your speech. Do not read from your notes, unless you have frozen or are not prepared. It will sound flat and stilted. If you have learned your speech, it will sound natural and you will even have the chance to ad lib, if the opportunity arises.

24. If you fail to prepare, you prepare to fail. This is one of the biggest mistakes I see. People think that they can "wing it", but in reality those who appear to be "winging it" are often very well prepared. Every one of Frankie Howard’s muses such as "ooh, now where was I?" was in the script and well rehearsed.

   It takes more than three weeks to prepare a good impromptu speech. - Mark Twain. Off the cuff should mean well planned. I once heard a tale about someone who went to the Garrick Club and accidentally left wearing Enoch Powell’s coat. In his pocket was a small pile of postcards, with his speech written on them. The speech started with the words "I never expected to be asked to speak this evening!" The professionals do it - so why shouldn’t you?

   Winston Churchill said that it only took him all of 10 minutes to prepare a two-hour speech, but it took him two hours to prepare a 10 minute one. His maiden speech took six weeks to prepare and was completely memorized.

25. Speak slowly and clearly. Don’t worry about presenting ALL your results. You are trying to present your work not teach a class. If it is a choice between making sure the audience understands a principle and making yourself look good, pick the latter.
26. Try to avoid presenting a great deal of general, introductory material. Present only the background that is immediately important to your paper. Keep in mind that often the most important part of a written paper is in the second half of the paper.

27. Don’t say too much. (The human brain sleeps when overwhelmed.)

28. Don’t wiggle the laser pointer. (Inducing nausea is not good.)

29. Don’t mumble with your back to the audience.

30. Don’t show more than 1 slide per minute.

31. Don’t show data without the punch line on top. (It took centuries to decipher the Rosetta stone. Your audience has 1 minute.)

32. Speak as if it is your own paper. That is, do not say things like "he says".

33. Start by stating the general goal of your paper. You should be able to do this in 1 to 3 sentences.

34. Try to give a simple, motivating example first. Examples are better than words or formulas. Try to explain by having an example that you follow for one or more steps.

35. I was recently advised to have an elevator pitch prepared. In fact, you might have several versions (a one minute, five minute, and ten minute version). Geri Stengel suggests Five Tips for a Perfect Elevator Pitch:

Whether you're looking for money, customers, employees, suppliers or partners, you'll need a great elevator pitch. The point of an "elevator pitch" is to get your prospects sufficiently interested in you or your company to exchange business cards or inspire a referral to someone else who might be helpful. You don't need to reel them in; you just need to get them on the hook.

1. Be Concise: An elevator pitch is a clear, concise and well-practiced description of you and/or your company. It must be delivered in the time it would take to ride up an elevator - in other words, no longer than 60 seconds. That's time for about 150-225 words.

2. Solve a Problem: Avoid sounding like a solution in search of a problem. Explain how your unique solution fills a "must have" need. If you aren't solving a problem or filling a need, you're in for a tough sell.

3. Speak in Plain English: Talk in tangibles, not abstractions, throughout your pitch. Bring it down to the man and woman on the street. Even if your product is complex, you'll lose your audience if you use industry-speak or technobabble.

4. Show Your Passion: A good pitch makes your heart race. Show the fire in your belly and your passion to succeed.

5. Tailor Your Pitch to Your Audience and With a Call to Action: To investors, the pitch focuses on your team and how you plan to make money. To customers, focus on the problem you can solve for them. Potential partners want to know what you're building, why it's important...and why you're going to be a success and they will make money. End with a call to action, but recognize that different audiences prompt different requests. In many cases, you'll ask if they'd be willing to set up a meeting or speak by phone. If you're really in an elevator, offer to walk straight back to the office to talk more!