

How-to: Prepare for your best Proposal or Defense*



Before your talk

- Remind your committee members the day before the talk of the date and time of your presentation
- Make sure a member of the exams committee will be present. Treat him/her just like a thesis committee member (i.e.; similar reminders)
- Make your slides available to the external committee members 24 hours in advance and ask them to confirm receipt
- If you will be using Skype or a teleconference system, test it in the room where you'll be speaking the week before your talk to ensure it works as you need it to
- Arrange for a friend who will make it their job to be sure the Skype/teleconference connections work and to deal with any and all technical glitches that come up during your talk so you can continue with your presentation
- PRACTICE to make sure your talk is the appropriate length
- PRACTICE your talk with your advisor
- PRACTICE your talk in front of other students
- PRACTICE your talk, in the same room, with the same equipment, the day before your presentation. Re-test your Skype or teleconference equipment.
- Have your slides on at least two different media. "I dropped my laptop" isn't an excuse for not doing your presentation



The day of / At your talk

- Make sure your committee is present; knock on doors five minutes before the talk to remind them
- Start ON TIME
- Follow good public speaking practice: go ahead and dress decently, speak loudly and clearly enough for people at the back to hear you, don't stand in front of the slides, if you point at something on the slides, continue to face the audience as you speak about it, etc
- If you have an external committee member, either in-person or via Skype, introduce him/her to the crowd
- Be certain to describe, briefly, what you'll be presenting ("My dissertation consists of 3 parts, which are X, Y, and Z; I discussed X extensively in my proposal, so in this talk I'll concentrate on Z. Y is material of technical interest to practitioners in this area, but doesn't lend itself well to a generalist talk, although I'm happy to answer questions about it as well.")
- Be even more certain to lay out your assumptions and model early in the talk, and your "**thesis statement**" -- something that you're going to make me believe by the end of this talk. ("We can make reliable encrypted terabyte-per-second long-distance communication channels using just pencils and peanut butter.")
- Make sure that the first 15 minutes can be understood by a bright undergrad, or a first year grad student not in your area, at least at SOME level. If you're asked to define a term, be absolutely sure that you can do so
- Never talk about your talk and how it's going. We all can see that you're having troubles with the pointer...suck it up and use your finger rather than saying "Gosh, I wish that the pointer worked better," or anything like that. (Your delegate should be off hunting for a new pointer the moment that s/he sees something is wrong, of course.)

Note that this is not a complete list. If you want to make suggested additions, please email Lauren Clarke (lkc@cs.brown.edu).

*Thanks to John Hughes