



## Effective Communication and Preparation for Your Next Oral Presentation



- January 13, 2022

As we kick off 2022, the New Year means new opportunities to share your research through an oral presentation. Regardless of whether you are a seasoned veteran or if this will be your first time presenting, there is no time like the present to brush up on your presentation style and perhaps re-evaluate that slide deck that you have relied on for so long.

Personally, my own presentation style and planning underwent a radical change after I attended a training session by the enigmatic Jean Luc Dumont (<https://www.principiae.be>) during my post-doctoral career at the VIB, Belgium. You can watch one of his training sessions here and although recorded in 2013, remains relevant today (<https://bit.ly/3BLWwbB>).

In this blog post, I will share some of key ideas that I found useful that you might also find equally effective as you prepare for your next oral presentation.

### Preparing Your Slides

Your challenge as the presenter is to condense one or even 10 years of research into a time slot that may be as short as 12 minutes. So, you need to effectively communicate as much as you can without putting as much information as you can on every slide.

**Tip #1:** Stop the distractions. Avoid the default master template emblazoned with all lines, colors and logos from your institution on every slide. Whilst you can have your affiliations on the title slide, it is unlikely you will be changing institutes between the beginning and the end of the presentation. Clean clear slides helps the audience focus on what is relevant (Figure 1).

**Tip #2:** Make your title for each slide a concluding statement (Figure 1). The “So What” that you want the audience to remember.

**Tip #3:** One piece of data per slide. Only put images and data in your slide that you will talk about. Do not rush to copy that entire figure from your paper. Only the panel/data that is relevant.

**Tip #4:** Friends don't let friends make bar charts: Think about how you want to present your data so that the audience knows exactly where to look (Figure 1). Further inspiration for making the right chart is here: (<https://bit.ly/3rHTP67>)

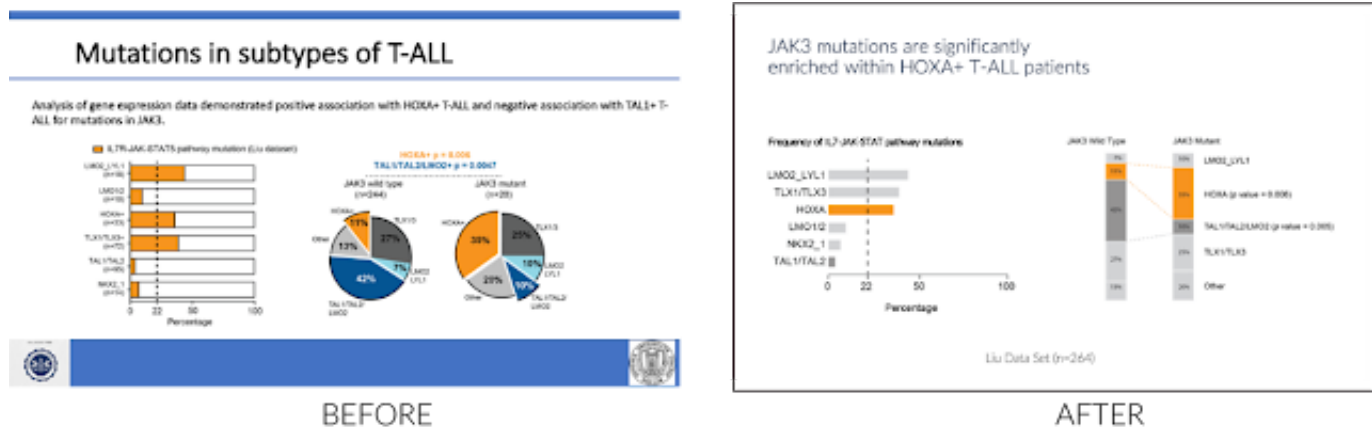


Figure 1: Before and after comparison for improving signal to noise of slide design. The original slide (Left) has a non-descript title and logo/banner distractions. The pie charts are difficult to interpret with respect to what the main message is for the audience and what to focus on. After removing all the distracting elements, the slide new slide (Right hand side) has a new “So what” heading . The charts have been redrawn with grey scales and a single color to help focus the audience to the data that supports the header text.

**Tip #5:** Be original and stop using default settings and stock images. Take some time to draw your own schematics. There are some fantastic drawing programs and resources available:

- Library of Science and medical illustrations (<https://somersault1824.gumroad.com//library>) An amazing and free resource but accepts donations to help support this library.
- Biorender (<https://biorender.com>)— Web based software but note free version does not allow publication permission in journals and can be low resolution at 72 dpi
- Pexels (<https://www.pexels.com>): If you must use stock photos, there are some nice science related photos here.

**Tip #6:** Try a new font. Microsoft will always default to calibri. Why not change to another clear sans serif font. You have the choice of Century Gothic, Arial and Helvetica .However, my favourite for presentations is Lato (which you can download for free: <https://www.latofonts.com/lato-free-fonts/>) because it has multiple format options for text design (light, heavy, regular, thin, bold etc) (Figure 2).

ISEH presentation in Calibri

ISEH presentations in Lato Light

ISEH presentation in Lato regular

ISEH presentation in Century Gothic

ISEH presentation in Lucida Sans

*Figure 2: Different fonts to consider for your next presentation.*

**Tip #7:** Remove that text. How many times have you seen a slide from another presenter with too much text? You need to honestly assess your own slide and remove that excess text.

**Tip #8:** ‘Less is more’ is the golden rule. If you have not realised already, remove everything on a slide that is not directly relevant to your message or you will not talk about. Delete delete delete.

### **Preparing What to Say**

**Tip #1:** Think about your audience: What do they want to hear? How much introduction do you need to provide that will otherwise prevent you talking about your exciting data? If you need to start a slide with “As you already know.....”, then reconsider why that slide is there to begin with, especially for a specialised audience.

**Tip #2:** Rehearse the first two slides. Rehearsing exactly what you will say for the first few slides can be a great way to help you ease into your presentation. In particular, practice any tricky vocabulary, especially if English is your second language.

**Tip #3:** Silence is your friend. Pausing helps bring focus and you should not be afraid to stop talking.

**Tip #4:** Virtual Presentation background check. If you are giving a virtual presentation make sure you have a well-lit room or consider getting a “Ring Light” for that perfect lighting. Check your background is professional. Place your laptop/camera (e.g. on books) at head height so that you are looking straight at the camera.

**Tip #5:** In Person conference theatre check. Find the room you will be presenting and arrive early. Stand on the stage, look around and get comfortable with the space. Check if they will use a lapel microphone or static microphone. If the presenting screen is behind you, check where will you stand and still be able to talk into the microphone. Determine if you need to use the “laser pointer” option in the software program if

the presentation is duplicated across multiple screens so that the entire audience will know what you are highlighting.

Hopefully you will find these ideas useful when designing your next presentation. If you have additional links and tips, why not place them in the comments box below?

*Charles de Bock*

*Team Leader*

*Functional Genomics or Leukaemia Group*

*Children's Cancer Institute*

*Sydney, Australia*



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**Unknown** *January 20, 2022 at 8:32 PM*

Thank you to the many messages on this blog regarding additional suggestions to improve your presentation. In the spirit of a science article, here are some supplementary tips:

Tip S1: Try and avoid colours that are common for people with colour blindness. IN particular, red and green line charts are almost impossible to discriminate. You can learn more here <https://www.brightcarbon.com/blog/optimising-presentations-for-people-with-colour-blindness/>

Tip S2: I advocated above for less text on slides. However, your audience will include people with English as a second language and potentially a hearing impairment. Therefore, the slide should have sufficient text for the audience to understand in the absence of the presenter. Equally, the presenter should be understood in the absence of the slide.

Finally, I was also made aware of a recent article in Nature on how to tell a compelling story in scientific presentations: <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-021-03603-2>

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