

## **Oratio horribilis : the art of giving a really crap talk**

### **I. Thou shalt make a big entrance**

Arrive late and flustered – you're a very busy person.  
Have multiple USB pens and multiple versions of your talk on each. But forget which one you are using today.  
The best maxim is: load up when you stand up.  
Like any good movie, the audience will appreciate this trailer and having the time to contemplate their un-busy lives.

### **II. Thou shalt not make it legible**

The projector screen will replicate exactly your PC screen  
The primary reason everybody is gathered is to look at the lovely background images, numerous fonts and off-beat colour combinations you put up, not the talks content. Each member of the audience's brain will work better as they squint to read text.  
Counting mis-spellings is an age-old hobby of audiences – keep the masses happy: turn off the spelling checker.

### **III. Thou shalt not be concise**

Always use complete sentences, even paragraphs, never just the pertinent key words. The smaller and denser the text, the better.  
Don't worry if it is hard to read. All the VIPs will either be up at the front or will personally write to you later for a copy.

### **IV. Thou shalt not keep it simple**

All the best talks needs more fancy graphics than a playstation shoot-em-up.  
Special effects are what the audience came to see – flashing text, trendy transitions, artful animations. **Dreamworks** talent scouts are commonly found in the audience at AVTRW meetings.

### **V. Thou shalt not avoid screenfuls of lovely, lovely data**

Data is like sushi, the rawer the better – most audiences can tot up moving averages, calculate significant differences and estimate correlations in their heads. Everybody appreciates deciphering with complex equations on screen.  
Avoid graphs at all costs – the best talks should have more numbers in them than a railway timetable.  
If forced to use a graph – make it as confusing as possible with a multiplicity of colours, lines, codes and symbols. Last thing you need is for the key result to be easily apparent.



## Oratio horribilis (contd.)

### VI. Thou shalt not make any eye contact

Averting your eyes demonstrates respect and a loveable coyness. Bouncing your voice off your boots and delivering your talk in a low monotonic chant will hypnotize the audience into accepting your outstanding research.

Best to talk softly into your chest or even better into your beer.

Read the talk slowly with your audience – it's a long time since most of these people were at primary school - they need the revision.

Words are rarely enough - jingling your keys, sighing often and any other bodily noises you can produce all help to bridge those little gaps.

### VII. Thou shalt not expect audience engagement

Never, ever anticipate questions or have extra "pop-in" slides ready just in case.

You are at your most creative under the glare of the audience - standing in front of 50 people guarantees quality thinking time.

Babble like a small stream when you don't have an answer – it reminds people of childhood summers spent in the countryside.

### VIII. Thou shalt not emphasize key points

Avoid having a structure and being systematic – keeping the audience struggling to follow your train of thought is much more avant-garde.

Have no background, no summaries, no conclusions – if they aren't smart enough to be instantly at one with you and your research on a single listen, they can just wait till they read it in **Nature**.

### IX. Thou shalt not have a good ending

Finish abruptly. This is the equivalent to a driving test emergency stop. They won't be expecting it though if you have performed well in the other points listed here, they will appreciate it.

Never acknowledge those who helped you.

Always acknowledge those who tried to stop you, disagreed with you or have generally thwarted your bid for world domination.

### X. Thou shalt not practice

Audiences enjoy spontaneity and prolonged pauses.

The best talks arrive like snow-flakes – totally unique and fully formed. Should you make the mistake and practice, ignore all advice given from your test audience.

Try to ensure that your talk is longer than the time you have to present it. Give them real value for money.



Actually, this advice was written tongue-in-cheek.  
Talk to your supervisor who will have given many different talks in  
many different venues about what you SHOULD do to make a  
worthwhile and memorable presentation.



...putting science into practice.