Suggestions for Speakers

REVISION HISTORY			
NUMBER	DATE	DESCRIPTION	NAME
	2012-05-19		WB

Contents

© 2012 Warren Block * Last updated 2012-05-19*

Available in HTML or PDF. Links to all my articles here. Created with AsciiDoc.

A collection of some tips for speaking at BSDCan that may come in handy. Some of these are my own, some I only learned from watching other speakers.

1   Speaking

Avoid verbalized pauses: "and um, uh, so, . . . " If you need to think, pausing silently is much more effective. Many people get in the habit of verbalized pauses, but it's a habit worth breaking.

When someone asks a question, repeat it so the rest of the audience can hear it and it will be on any recording.

Bring a bottle of water. Keep it closed except when drinking to avoid embarrassing spills.

If you have live demos, don't just show the user the commands, but tell them in general terms what the commands accomplish. Don't assume they know everything you know, or are even able to see the screen clearly.

When asking for feedback, ask negative questions. In other words, don't ask "Can everyone hear?" Instead, ask "Is there anyone who can't hear?" Or ask "Can the back row hear me?" Likewise, if the participants are doing a task, don't ask if everyone is done, but if anyone is **not** done.

2   Posture

Don't put your hands in your pockets, it's a defensive posture. Don't cross your arms, that's a posture of rejection. Keep your shoulders back and stand up straight, like you know what you're talking about. Big, sweeping hand movements may be helpful.

3   Rehearsals

Rehearse your presentation out loud. An audience is not necessary, but speak it out loud to get an idea of the actual time it will take. Rehearsals also help to familiarize the material, so you know what's coming up and can be ready for questions.

Rehearse the setup, too. It may take a few minutes to get the projector going, and if you've tried that beforehand you will know what to expect.

Use different source material. LibreOffice, for example, may not run when you get there, so have a PDF version of the slides on a USB memory stick, and rehearse from that version a few times.

4   Video

Use big margins for slides. Projectors are evil, they hate you and will cut off edges of slides whenever possible.

Make slides high contrast for readability. Some projectors are very dim (and evil, of course). Find the light switches in the room and be prepared to turn them off when needed.

Bring an adapter to connect your computer to a standard VGA monitor. Bring a standard VGA cable also.

If you plan to use dual displays, make a list of settings and commands needed to get the displays right (xrandr, opening the program window on one display, and so on). Have a script that does all the setup. Test it. And remember, projectors are evil, so be prepared to work off one display.

If you have examples that require running a program, create scripts and run them in rehearsals. Make sure they do any initialization and cleanup necessary so they will work when run repeatedly. Use large fonts.

5   Timing

Leave at least five or ten minutes at the end for questions and setup for the next presentation. (Sorry, Bjoern!)

6   Relax

Before starting, breathe deeply and relax. The audience will hear tension and sense weakness. No, not really. Everybody will enjoy it more if you are calm, or excited because of what you're talking about rather than just tense.

7   Sincerity

Be sincere about what you're saying. A presentation is a kind of sales pitch, but you're selling an idea.