

# How to give a talk

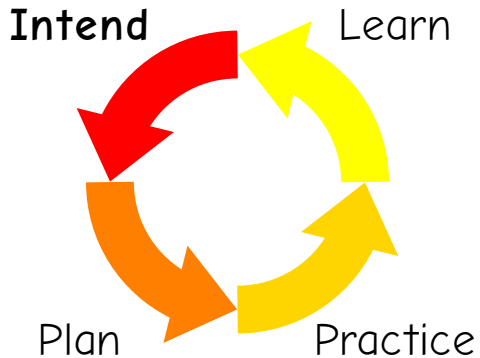
Chung-chieh Shan  
PLMW, 2019-01-15



**Hana**

People who say "no pun intended"  
are cowards. Intend your puns, weaklings.

# How to do a thing



# Establish intent

**What do you want?** Something about the audience, not just you:

- ▶ convey an idea? teach a skill? prove a proposition? change a preconception?
- ▶ get people to read your paper or use your software?
- ▶ join a community of scholars? get a job? impress people in power?
- ▶ forestall interaction? cover ass? avoid questions? feel superior?

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**Pick one idea** 🤨



**Resist thesis creep**





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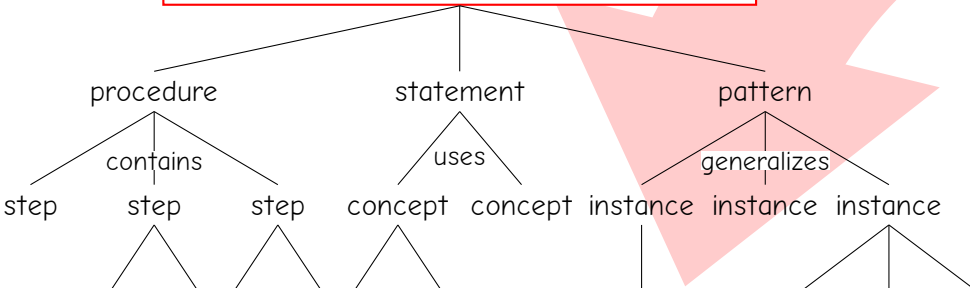


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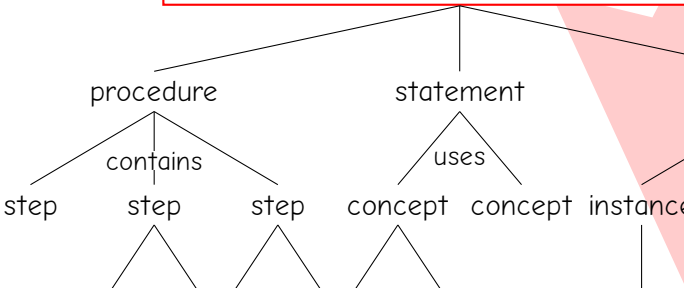


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🕒 **Pick one idea** 🤨 **Resist thesis creep** 🖊️



*How to exit freeway like a boss (2013)*

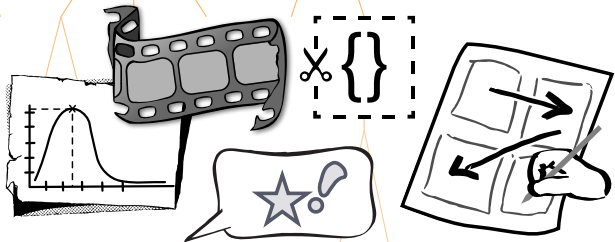


# Develop plan

**Collect techniques** that suit you. What can you do? (Try my advice.)

**constraints** that spur you. What can you not do? (Who needs animation.)

**products** that inspire you. What do others do? (Highlight reels hide work.)

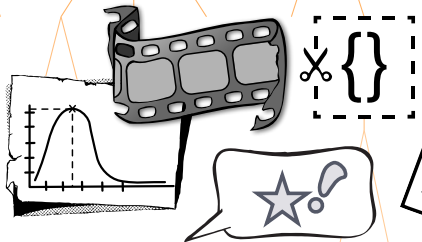


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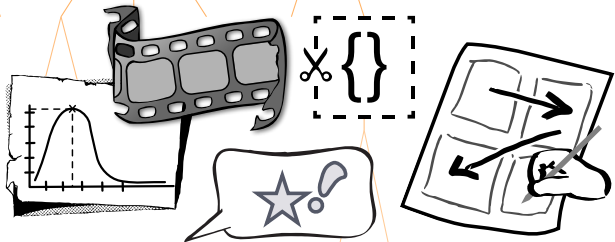


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Put in the work. Respect your audience's time.

**Start early** and gentle. Enjoy the journey.



real to-do list this wednesday:  
-watch Ru Paul Drag Race, take extremely careful notes on a 2-minute span of 1 episode  
-make some tweets and facebook posts  
-literally please even open the dissertation document and glance at it. don't even look directly at it, just peripheral vision

4:32 PM - 4 Apr 2018

27 Likes



2



27



Tweet your reply



Chung-chieh Shan @ccshan · Apr 4

Replying to @kirbyoonrod

Called out 😏



1



Laurie Dermer @lauriedermer · Apr 4

Replying to @kirbyoonrod

Ahahaha I also set this incredibly low bar for myself on occasion with my thesis



1



2



Laurie Dermer @lauriedermer · Apr 4

"Okay self you don't want to do that and that's reasonable. But hey, let's open your thesis to the last part you worked on, and just commit to being in front of the computer for a bit. no pressure"

# Develop plan

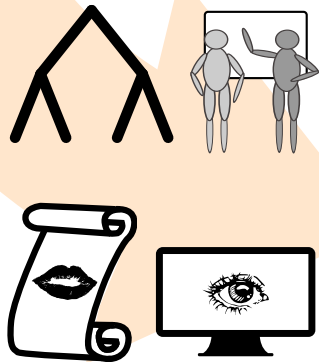
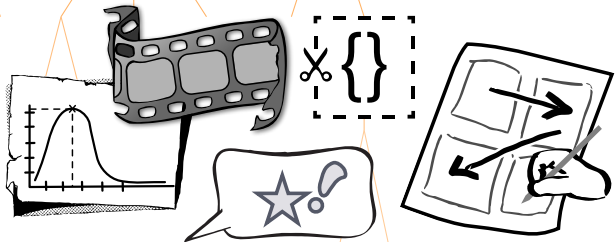
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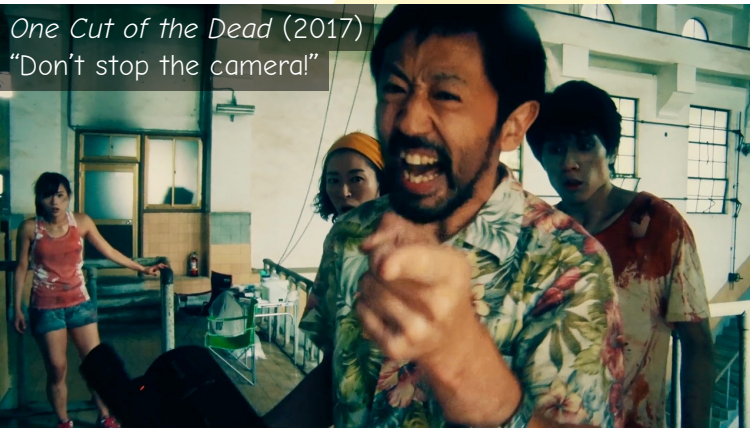
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# Practice script

Practice as **soon** as possible, as **seriously** as possible

- ▶ Rehearsing even just one slide makes the rest of your plan concrete
- ▶ Rehearse entire talk (especially (each) beginning), record yourself, and **listen**





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**Alternate focus** between intent (connection) and script (technique)

Intent (connection)

Plan

Script (technique)

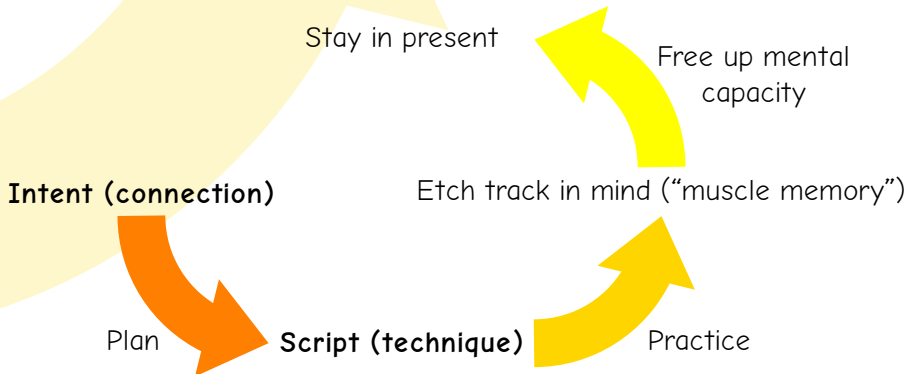


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**Alternate focus** between intent (connection) and script (technique)

Engage audience

Manage time

Fix equipment

...

Intent (connection)

Stay in present

Free up mental  
capacity

Etch track in mind (“muscle memory”)

Plan

Script (technique)

Practice

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# Learn from experience

## Intent is not magic

- ▶ What worked? What didn't? How do you find out?
- ▶ What will you change, to increase efficacy and reduce collateral damage?

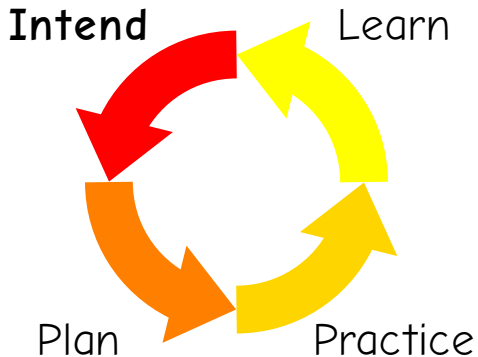
Who do you want to please?

- ▶ Are you kissing up?
- ▶ Are you punching up?

If you care, solicit negative **feedback** in the face of politeness

- ▶ “What are you most confused about?”
- ▶ “When did you tune out?”
- ▶ “Thanks! I’ll trust your compliment more when you tell me what sucked.”
- ▶ Shut up and listen

# How to give a talk



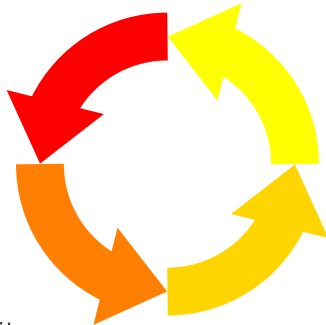
# How to give a talk

## Establish intent

- ▶ Build trust
- ▶ Grow outline

## Develop plan

- ▶ Track nodes
- ▶ Track edges
- ▶ Handle diversity



## Learn from experience

- ▶ Give a practice talk

## Practice script

- ▶ Work with audience
- ▶ Speak in session

# Build trust to cooperate with audience

Declare your intent up front:

- ▶ “I’m here to recruit you to do two things.”
- ▶ “This is joint work with X and Y, but I’m the one on the job market this year.”
- ▶ “At the end of your handout is a question menu, or you can ask your own.”
- ▶ “I can’t take any questions because I have 60 slides and 10 minutes.”

I will tune out if you lose my trust because I see you bullshit or punch down.

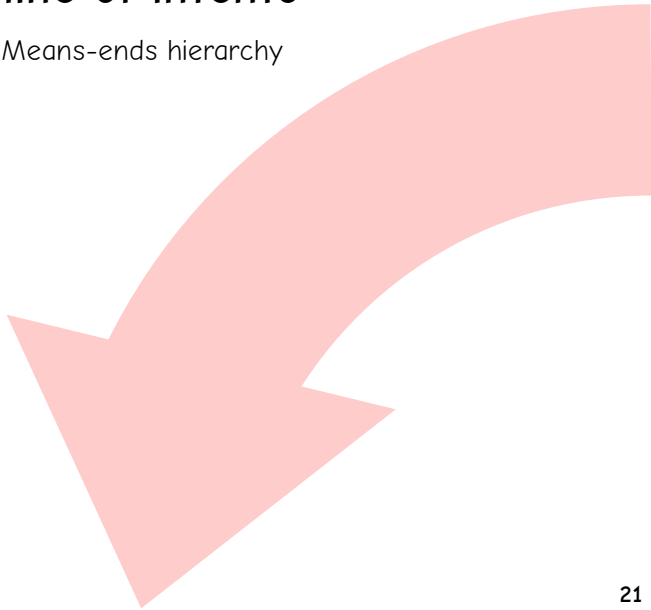
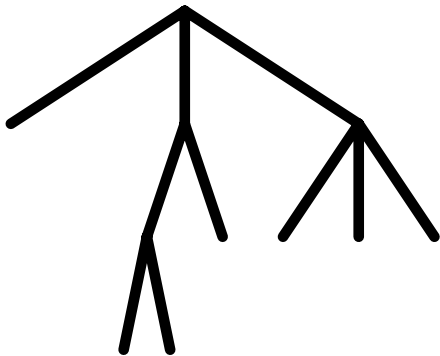
*I can't believe what you say, because I see what you do (1964)*



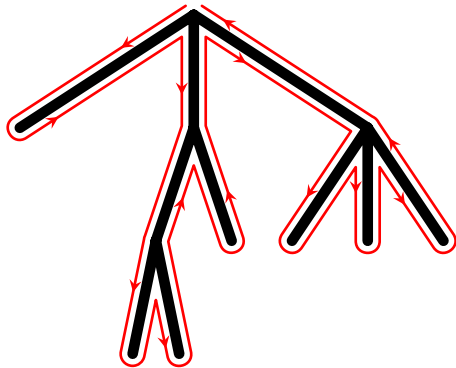


# Grow outline of intents

Means-ends hierarchy



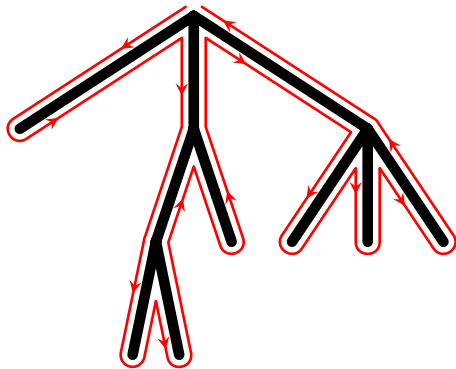
# Grow outline of intents



Means-ends hierarchy + **linear traversal**

- ▶ prefix (up front)
- ▶ infix (opening gambit/in medias res/  
particular-general-particular/recall plan)
- ▶ postfix (conclusion)

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## Refactor!

- ▶ Prune unused content
- ▶ Unify similar content
  - design a running example
- ▶ Inline uncommonly used content
  - expand notation away
- ▶ Introduce commonly used content
  - (only) by example, not just formally
- ▶ Rename in context
  - $x_1, x_2 \rightarrow x, y \rightarrow src, dst$

# Track outline nodes

Stay on point! A node is an intent, like to convey X, seldom just to talk about X. Tell the audience what you want them to notice in each talk/section/slide/plot.

How to point at a topic

**Projected** is good on multiple mirrored screens

**Body** is good for commanding attention

**Stick** is ok if you can't reach

**Laser** can be hard to see

**Your computer screen** is invisible to everyone else

Steady

- ▶ Pointer movement
- ▶ Keep content to digest, across slide changes or on handout

Speech in synchrony

- ▶ Slow down (enjoy speaking it)
- ▶ Loud and clear, or quiet and suspenseful

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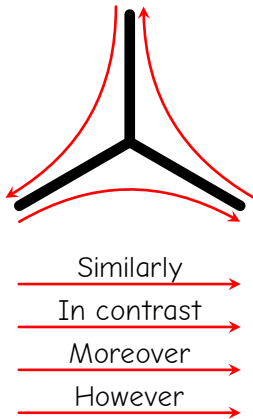
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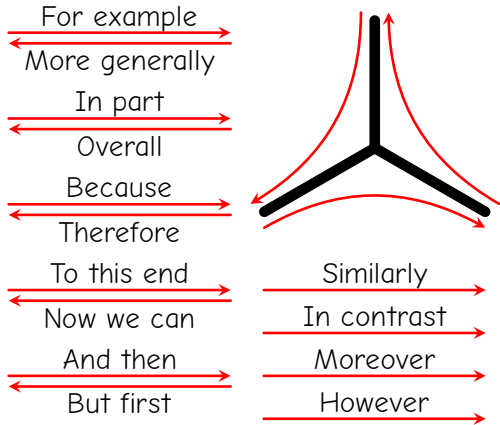
# Track outline edges

For example  
More generally  
In part  
Overall  
Because  
Therefore  
To this end  
Now we can  
And then  
But first



**Specify the relationship** at each move

# Track outline edges



Specify the **relationship** at each move

## Display

- ▶ Show the **diagrams** in your mind or on your whiteboard:
  - ▶ a compiler pipeline
  - ▶ a proof tree
  - ▶ a dependency graph
  - ▶ a system architecture
  - ▶ not just a bullet list or formula
- ▶ Indicate **similarities** with consistent shapes and positioning

## Speech

- ▶ Disambiguate with radio intonation
- ▶ Speak complete utterances
  - ▶ not trailing off
  - ▶ not distracted by slide change

# Handle diversity

Not everyone knows/cares.

Identify broad themes in common → Remind yourself that your work is great

Multiple modalities.

Interaction.



# Work with audience

Voice coach says:

**Stand up straight and breathe.**



Remember, **it's about them.**

More ways to respond to questions:

- ▶ Say it again for folks in the back
- ▶ Rephrase the question to make it make sense before answering it
- ▶ “I didn’t get the question”
- ▶ “I don’t have an answer”
- ▶ “Let’s chat afterwards”

# Speak in a conference session

Introduce yourself to session chair

- ▶ name pronunciation
- ▶ pronouns
- ▶ bio?
- ▶ **disambiguate time signals**

Check A/V before session

- ▶ text & color     legible
- ▶ voice & sound     audible (mic distance?)
- ▶ laser pointer     visible
- ▶ remote control     reachable
- ▶ wireless mic     wearable
- ▶ interpreter     visible and audible

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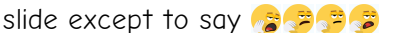
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Listen to other talks in the session

- ▶ don't fiddle with your slides

Stay on time

- ▶ acknowledge time signals
- ▶ don't say "I'm going to skip this slide except to say 



- ▶ last resort:  
switch to last slide and stop

End clearly

- ▶ **summarize on last slide**
- ▶ speak "thank you" for applause
- ▶ hang out after session

# Give a practice talk

Explain before:

- ▶ Talk venue
- ▶ Audience to simulate
- ▶ Desired feedback

Collect during:

- ▶ Timing (per slide?)
- ▶ Instant feedback (in side channel)

Rehearsal includes audience questions.

Discuss after:

- ▶ Junior folks give feedback first, because  
They are usually the intended audience  
They should learn constructive criticism  
They can pick off low-hanging fruit first
- ▶ One piece of feedback per person, because
  - 🕒 Pick one idea 🗨️ Resist thesis creep

**Focus on problem identified by feedback** before solution suggested

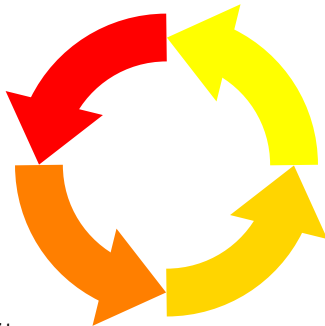
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“Honesty.”

—Patrick Blackburn



“Performance is actually one of the only spaces we can be honest anymore.”

—Alok Vaid-Menon



“People are going to look. Give them something to look at.”

—Jefferson Tugger