Strategy and Tactics for Technical Talks

David Ford
College of Forest Resources
University of Washington
You must choose a strategy for your technical talk because:

an explicit strategy actively engages your audience

and

determines effective solutions to technical questions

And avoids
Why is a strategy needed?

What strategies can be used?

Which strategy will be effective?
Why is a strategy needed?

For the audience:

The objective of speaking technically is to change people’s thought/behavior.

Helps you think what the audience should know, not what you want to say.
For yourself:

Reduce the fear of losing the audience’s attention

Feel authoritative by knowing what you are trying to do

Sound authoritative by thinking through the process of communication
What strategies can be used?

Strategies are based on:

- The type of outcome you intend in the listeners

- The dramatic structure that will make the presentation vivid
Recall: The objective of speaking technically is to change people’s thought/behavior.

Research:
persuasion that this information meets that purpose.

Buy/Do:
the focus is on someone doing or getting something new

Modify:
promoting change in the use of a procedure or device.
Dramatic Structures

**Thesis**
State the thesis - so inviting the audience to evaluate and appraise your information.

**Disaster**
Begin with evocation of the disaster and examine how it could have been prevented.

**Problem**
Present an interesting and important problem for the listeners and solve it.
Puzzle

An unresolved anomaly or difficulty within a theory or procedure

Comparison or Contrast

Highlight specific advantages of one system, idea or procedure over another

Ninepins

Eliminate one after another of a set of competing items until only one is left standing
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I will argue that …

Pull information together systematically to argue a valuable case
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You should use this method

Present information for using the method over others. Useful framework for complex arguments.
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You should change procedure X because...

Appropriate for “in house” presentations. Identify where the change is needed.
Research

**Disaster**

Describe a disaster - “We do not yet know what caused it.” Analyze possible reasons, and indicate the research needed.

**Problem**

Don’t let this happen to you! The classic sales technique. Evoke images of doom, and destruction until your listeners cry aloud “What shall we do to be saved!” Then tell them to use your brand X.
“Can you help us solve this?” Bring the listeners as near as possible to the cutting edge of a discipline by concentrating on a central puzzle.

Why theory X is better than theory Y. The classic “conflict of views” approach.

“These explanations won’t do because …” Demolish all but the favored theory.
Which strategy will be effective?

The type of your research and the stage it has reached will influence your choice.

Essential tactical requirements in delivery that any talk must meet - these can influence your choice.
The type and stage of your research

Ecological analysis or synthesis, or a new quantitative method?

Analysis of the problem

Preliminary results
Essential tactical requirements

The problems that many people identify:

http://faculty.washington.edu/edford/Courses/QERM597/suggestions.html

Signposting the organization

Defining adequate introductory material

Planning the visual aids
Communicate with your listeners ... 

... not with your machine!