Liz Bradley's Presentations Hints

- Keep your hands out of your pockets. Project enthusiasm, but stop short of eagerness. Move around the front of the room — chaotically.

- Maintain eye contact with the entire room. Identify "indicators" early on: people whose faces are expressive. You can then watch those faces when you want to know whether the audience is getting it, or if you get nervous.

- Dress so you're comfortable (or get comfortable in a suit or dress).

- Indicate things on the screen, not on your laptop. Buy yourself a laser pointer; you'll use it forever and you won't have to scramble to borrow one right before a talk. Be aware that they can magnify hand wobbles, though, especially in a big room. To mitigate this, you can use a two-handed grip, with one hand supporting the other.

- Don't read your slides to the audience. In fact, try not to verbalize *any* combination of the words on the slide, verbatim. Vary the order, use synonyms, expand, or distill. (An interesting cultural difference: at philosophy meetings, it's standard practice for someone to stand up and read his or her paper.)

- Make sure that the text, drawings, and symbols on your slides are large enough. If you can, get access to the presentation venue the day before you give the talk, make sure that your computer works with the equipment in that room, and go to the back of the room to check whether the fonts and pictures are visible. You can avoid the laptop changeover hassle by asking the person who's presenting right before you if you can plug your USB drive into their computer.

- Keep the amount of information on each slide small and closely related. A well-selected and -constructed slide should require no more than two–five minutes of discussion.

- Maintain a high, ongoing ratio of organization/outline/intro/summary to technical content. Everyone in the audience should, at every point in your talk, know where the current subtopic came from, what its motivation is, and where it's going. Using—and returning to—an outline slide can help with this, as can running footers on your slides.

- When using PowerPoint and similar tools, don't go overboard with embellishments, fonts, fades, animations, etc. It has been shown that the good old-fashioned black-on-white is the most effective representation for conveying information. Some people are even put off by glitzy graphics, assuming that you put that much effort into the presentation because your work was somehow lacking. This is especially true in mathematics, where the highest respect is reserved for someone who walks in without notes, picks up the chalk, and goes for it.

- It's a good idea to have your presentation stored on a USB drive as well, in multiple formats (ppt, pptx, pdf, ...); that way you can easily run it from another computer if there are problems getting yours to work with the projector. If you do this, make sure that any supporting files (movies, etc.) are on the USB drive too.

- *Don't leave home without the appropriate dongles!!!* And don't *ever* check the bag that holds your presentation materials into the belly of an airplane. Keep them in that overhead bin.

- Consider printing out hardcopies of your slides if you *really* want people to take home your message.

- When giving a high-stakes presentation like a conference or job talk, some people believe in the 1/3–1/3–1/3 ratio: that your whole audience should be with you for the first third of the talk, people in your field should follow the first two thirds, and you should lose all but one person for the last third. I think this is nonsense; it's *really* hard to give a clear talk about tough material, and most people know that. Some junior faculty — and many grad students — don't think you're smart unless they can't understand you, so there's a lot of pressure to be opaque in these high-stakes, evaluative situations. One way to compromise is to vastly raise the intellectual level whenever you're answering an audience question. Then they'll know that you can blow them out of the water but are choosing not to :-) (Note: I am **not** talking about your class presentation here; please make that accessible to everyone!)

- A corollary of this is to learn how to say "I don't know" when you don't know. Trying to wing it can be painfully obvious, and will leave people with far less respect for you than if you'd said "I have absolutely no idea..." and then tried to reason out the answer.