

Writing an Ignite Talk

Ignite talks are the standard format of events like ICCM and other GIS-focussed events. They look great on stage, and might seem impossible to do if you're not used to speaking. But it's not that bad really. You too can write and present and ignite talks!

So what **is** an Ignite Talk?

An ignite is a 5-minute talk where you supply 20 slides. Each of those slides is shown for 15 seconds before automatically moving to the next one.

5 minutes. That's not too bad.

How do you start planning an Ignite talk?

Here's how I do it. This isn't the "right" way - it's just one of many - but it's a place for you to start.

First, **know what you want to talk about**. For instance, I want to give an ignite talk about giving ignite talks. You know the general area of the event (e.g. "crisismapping") - what about or around that area excites or worries you? What have you been talking a lot about this year? Tell the stories you're already telling... for example, this might be Leesa talking about virtual PTSD, Om about organisation, Rose about some VOST work she loved. Or tell a new one you want to explore - "if we could do this, then...". Write a first sentence about each story.

Then **start thinking about what's important to you** about that story. Where are you going for information about it? Who's done really useful things about it? What would you do if you had unlimited resources? Berkun suggests picking 4 important points to make in your story, but you might have 2, or 5 or 6. Start listing your points for each story.

Then **try talking for 5 minutes about each story**. It took me years to figure out that a talk isn't about you standing up and being judged by the audience - it's a conversation between you and them, a way of getting people to talk about and act on things that you care about. Think about telling your mother or grandmother or best friend about this theme... what would you tell them? Write it down - or if you're not great at writing things down, either record yourself talking and write it up later, or talk to someone else and get them to write down what you say. And draw pictures (they'll be useful later).

Outline your script. I usually start a googledoc that looks like this:

Title of talk Slide 1: introduction Slide 2: point 1 ... Slide 20:

thank you and goodbye

- I usually have the first slide for an introduction (and getting on the stage), the last slide for thank yous and reiterating those major points (and getting off the stage), and give each of points an equal number of the remaining 18 slides. At least, that's where I start - I often realise that some points are bigger than others, and adjust the slides accordingly. Sometimes it makes sense to devote some of the earlier slides to background - that's fine too. The important thing is that you start writing, and that you know that at this stage it'll be a long way from the perfect performances you see up on the stage.

Start writing your script. You should by now have 1) an outline document, and 2) the text from talking to your friends, grandmother etc. Start putting them together: put your words into your outline, and adjust both of them to fit. Remember that it's okay to "cheat": for example, if you want to talk longer about one slide, then repeat it; and go watch some videos of ignite talks (www.crisismappers.net has lots of these) to see how other people do it. At this point, you don't need to write essays - 15 seconds of talking isn't much more than one paragraph of text, so a sentence of two per slide is fine.

Find images. You're going to need something on your slides. At this point, your talk isn't polished, and that's a good thing - because when you start looking for images, you'll probably want to adjust it again. We're lucky - we do a lot of work that's visual (e.g. maps and documents) and can be either used directly (jpgs) or captured using a screen grabber (see below). There are also a lot of free images and clipart (cartoon images: try googling "free clipart") on the internet too. Avoid bulletpoints and lots of words if you can - your audience will be reading those rather than listening to you (which isn't a good thing, no matter how shy you are); using a single word or sentence can be very powerful though, so consider this as an option too.

Tidy up your script. By now, you have 20 images and a script. You remember that 15 seconds per slide? Time to practice it. Pick a random piece of text, find a stopwatch, breathe slowly, talk slowly and read out the text for 15 seconds, leaving a short gap between each sentence. For me, that's a small paragraph - about 3 sentences. Go back over your script, and first tidy up by eye (editing and moving text so you get your points across in the time that you have available), then time reading out the script for each slide, and adjust until you're somewhere near 15 seconds, speaking slowly.

Record your talk. Now you have 20 slides and a 5-minute script that matches them. Time to record yourself. Powerpoint allows you to auto-advance slides and include an audio track (see below for details); it also allows you to re-record the audio for each slide, so you can record each slide separately and overwrite anything you're not sure about. Go do this. And now you have an ignite talk!

Write an abstract. Nearly done. A lot of conferences ask you for an “abstract”, or summary of what the talk is about. You have your story above- write a paragraph that describes it, and send it on in!

Where can you find more advice?

Here's some advice from people who've given ignite talks before:

- Scott Berkun, “How to give a great ignite talk” <http://scottberkun.com/2009/how-to-give-a-great-ignite-talk/>
- Cory Forsyth “How to give an ignite talk”, <http://coryforsyth.com/2009/02/24/how-to-give-an-ignite-talk/>
- Mark Pollard: <http://www.markpollard.net/8-tips-for-your-ignite-presentation/>
- Jill Foster: <http://debbieweil.com/blog/how-to-prepare-ignite-and-ted-talks-jill-foster/>
- Jason Grigsby: <http://userfirstweb.com/328/successful-ignite-presentations/>

Useful Tools

- Screengrabber - software that lets you copy part of your desktop. Macs have a [built-in screengrabber](#); I use [MW Snap](#) on my Windows machine.
- Voice recorder. I use my phone, but there are also [online voice recorders](#).
- Slides with audio: Powerpoint: [microsoft instructions](#); Powerpoint [fordummies instructions](#); [PresentationTube](#)