Today I'm going to give you an overview of the basic tenets of bad speaking. You may think that speaking badly comes naturally, but it's really an art form. If you concentrate on these ideas instead of on your material, I guarantee that you'll give a bad talk.

Before I start, I should mention that the original idea for this talk comes from Dave Patterson, one of the Berkeley faculty members and one of the people behind several major advances in Computer Science, including reduced instruction set computing (RISC) and redundant arrays of inexpensive disks (RAID's).

Let me put up the list of commandments. I'll go through each one and explain it, telling you when and why to use it, and what to do when you can't.

[put up slide #1]

I. THOU SHALT NOT BE NEAT.

Why should you waste your valuable research time preparing slides? Spelling, grammar, and legibility are not important in a talk--anyone with half a brain is going to know what you mean, anyway. And even if the whole audience thinks your talk stinks, who cares? At most there will be 50 people. Compared to the 6.5 billion people in the world, those 50 are negligible.

The exception to this commandment is your numbers. Numbers can sometimes be useful in belittling audience members who have the audacity to ask questions that you're not prepared to answer. For example, if someone gets up and asks, "Would you mind putting up that last slide again, please? I'm not sure I quite understood," you flip up this baby [put up slide #2] and respond, "How could you not understand my results? Look! 50, 100, 50, 100. We're twice as good." [remove slide] "I thought kindergarten was a prerequisite for this conference!"

[put up slide #1 again]

The second commandment is this:

II. THOU SHALT NOT WASTE SPACE.

Now I could have put all of these commandments on separate slides, each with an appropriate illustrative example, but just think about how much time and money I've saved by putting them all onto one slide. These little plastic things are maybe 35 cents each! That's three dollars and fifteen cents saved on just this talk!

If you just can't figure out how to fill up the space on a slide, then cut the slide up into pieces that you can use. But don't throw those pieces away! When you need a larger piece, you may be able to make one by using two smaller pieces and a bit of scotch tape.

[put up slide #3]

Oh yeah, and another money saving tip. Re-use slides whenever you can. Just wipe off old pen marks and add new ones as you need them. This slide, for example, I've reused from another one of my talks for the third commandment,

[put up slide #4]

III. THOU SHALT NOT COVET BREVITY.

Do you want to continue the stereotype that scientists can't write? Always use complete sentences on your slides, never just key words. If possible, use whole paragraphs and read every word [read from the slide--this should be on it]. Some of the worst talks I've ever seen were the ones where people just took their research paper, printed it on slides, and stuck them up on the screen. Think of the time that saved them over making new slides for the same material!

When you're forced to make an exception to this rule, perhaps because you don't have enough slides to print your whole paper, you can either print just the odd pages (that way you get one with your name on it) or you can use lots of abbreviations and acronyms. Nothing is more fun for an audience than trying to decipher cryptic phrases in the short time that you keep them on the screen, and this kind of style adds that special air of mystery characteristic of so many bad talks, and indeed whole disciplines.

Next,

IV. THOU SHALT COVER THY NAKED SLIDES.

There's nothing worse than an audience that doesn't have the sense to hang on your every word. Help them learn some manners and keep them from reading ahead: when you give your talk, use a sheet of paper to block off the part of the slide that you haven't reached [do it]. Once you get good at this technique, you can use a second sheet of paper to block off the parts you've already read, too [do it]. That way, the audience tries harder to follow what you're saying, because they know that once they fall behind, they might as well leave.

Some people think that overlays are a good method if you need some suspense, but we all know that every overlay costs 35 cents.

If you forget to bring a piece of paper, just turn the projector on and off as you read each sentence [do it]. This has the added advantage of making it hard for people to sleep while you're talking [do it a few times].

The fifth commandment is this:

V. THOU SHALT NOT WRITE LARGE.

Everyone knows that only conceited people write with large fonts. Be humble and use a small one. Besides, important people sit in the front of the room--why should you care about the riff-raff in the back? If they were important, they wouldn't be sitting way back there.

The only time you'll want to use a large font is when you really have to hide something.

[put up slide #5, read the blurb, and remove it]

And number six:

VI. THOU SHALT NOT USE COLOR.

Flagrant use of color indicates uncareful research. It's also unfair to emphasize some words over others.

[put up slide #6]

But if you run out of black ink, make every word a different color. That way you make it exciting for the audience and fair to the words.