The Ten Commandments of Viewgraph Presentation (with commentary)

1. *THOU SHALT NOT EXCEED THINE ALLOTTED TIME*

If you make a great presentation, sparkling with wit, humor, and insight, *perhaps* people will tolerate a little excess time. Realistically, however, this won't happen often before you win a Nobel, and even if people don't like your style they will at least tolerate it if you stick to your time. In a conference, running over means that you are stealing time from the next presentation, so DON'T DO IT!

2. *THOU SHALT NOT MUMBLE, STUMBLE, AND APOLOGIZE*

It may be a natural tendency to tell the audience that you have laryngitis, that you stayed up until 4 AM scribbling your transparencies, that you just started working on the project a week ago, etc., to gain sympathy and understanding. Alas, such a proclamation will only alert the audience that you will probably make mistakes. This establishes a negative atmosphere, so avoid it. Your audience wants you to succeed, not to wring your hands dejectedly.

3. *THOU SHALT ENUNCIATE CLEARLY*

Demosthenes practiced speaking with pebbles in his mouth so that he could learn to speak clearly. This is something of an extreme solution, but if your delivery sounds like you forgot to take the pebbles out, the subtleties of your message will be lost. Speak slowly and distinctly, remembering that some of your audience is foreign and can't understand auctioneer-style lectures.

4. *THOU SHALT NOT BURY THINE TRANSPARENCIES IN EQUATIONS*

Do you want to make sure that your audience doesn't pay attention? Then, by all means, put as many equations as possible on each page. Unless your audience has the comprehension rate of Evelyn Wood and the mathematical prowess of Chandrasekhar, they will just be confused or bored. Occasional equations are okay, but only if they are essential to the presentation. People want to hear concepts, not integrals.

5. *THOU SHALT NOT FILL THINE PAUSES*

In a normal conversation it often seems natural to indicate that one isn't done speaking by making filler noises. Fine, except that over the course of an hour-long lecture people in the audience will start to count every "um" and "er". Leave a silent spot if you must!

6. *THOU SHALT NOT FIDGET*

Another great way to draw attention away from your topic is to have twitches like adjusting your viewgraph by a millimeter every five seconds. Gestures should be few and meaningful.

7. *THOU SHALT FACE THINE AUDIENCE*

The projection screen probably won't be edified much by your talk, so don't face it all the time! Involve people in the audience by looking around at them; don't focus on one person, though, or your victim will wonder if tarantulas are crawling on his shoulders.

8. *THOU SHALT GIVE BACKGROUND*

Why should your audience care about what you've done? Give some context! It is unlikely that everyone in the audience is an expert in the subject you're presenting, and even if they are they won't mind a few minutes at the beginning where you set the stage.

9. *THINE TRANSPARENCIES SHALT BE WRIT LARGE*

Conceivably your audience will have a few alert, enraptured individuals with the visual acuity of Ted Williams, but there are also likely to be professors emeriti with one eyeball in the grave. For such people, it is important that the writing be large and clear; we're talking at least 20pt, here, folks. If your handwriting is clear, then handwritten transparencies may work, but the same principle applies.

10. *THOU SHALT USE COLOR AND DIAGRAMS*

Color and schematic diagrams add variation to the presentation, and if properly used can allow the audience to follow trends and concepts much better than just writing or your stirring oratory. Remember, though, that diagrams or figures shouldn't be too cluttered (see point 9 above), and colors should be carefully chosen and meaningful. A transparency so awash in different colors that it looks like you made it during an LSD trip will distract from, not enhance, your presentation.