

## GUIDELINES FOR ORAL and POSTER PRESENTATIONS

### ORAL PRESENTATION:

The audience will not be specialists in your field. So gear your talk accordingly.... DON'T give the traditional scientific meeting talk. Think of your talk as an 8-minute Plenary Address. Focus on the big picture, not all the gory details.

Your talk should focus on your work in the context of climate-change and its impacts. The presentation should include an overview of the major theme/historical context, rationale for your specific work (why you found it interesting/important enough to devote a significant portion of your life to it), your result(s) and significance, how colleagues from other disciplines and if possible an example of how the research community and/or the user community might use your results.

**Revamp your dissertation title** to serve as “bait”. Imagine you will be presenting at a large interdisciplinary, international gathering with many concurrent sessions that attract specialists from many different fields (natural and social science) as well as reporters from many of the major newspapers. *Your primary chance to get attention is through the presentation title.* With many concurrent sessions, you need to be easily understood by a non-specialist and compelling, even entertaining, in your word craft to attract a large audience. Take some time to think of an interesting, intriguing title for your talk - one that will grab a non-specialist’s attention. Here’s an example from a recent scientific meeting (AAAS 2004): “Taking the Heat - Can Ocean Fertilization Really Help Cool Climate?”

- **Include your “revamped” and your “official” dissertation title on the first slide** for comparison. Be sure to include your name and current institutional affiliation as well so your audience will know who you are.
- **Limit your talk to 8 minutes.** You will be allotted 9 minutes total. If your talk is less than 8 minutes, you will have more time for questions. Remember, the questions tend to be the most interesting part of the presentation. We recommend you aim your talk for 7 minutes to allow 2 minutes for questions. Again, **8:00 minutes** is the **maximum** you will be allowed for your talk. We can't stress enough that this will be a very interdisciplinary group, unfamiliar with all that jargon you take so much for granted. So prepare your talk as a short 'plenary address' for a broad interdisciplinary audience rather than the sort of presentation generally made at a discipline-specific meeting. There will be plenty of other time for discussion of your work -- five days to interact one-on-one and in small groups, and a poster presentation for discussing your data and all the gory details. You can also bring copies of your papers.
- **Remember your audience!** This audience will include Ph.D. graduates across the full range of topics covering climate change and its impacts (including both natural and social scientists). They are intelligent and well educated, and extremely interested in the study of climate change and its impacts, but are novices to your field of study. Prepare a sort of “mini-plenary” aimed at a general audience, NOT experts in your field. Avoid jargon and explain all discipline-specific words. No acronyms unless absolutely necessary; if so, be sure to spell it out on one of your slides. Explicitly link your work to climate change and/or its impacts. Provide a context for those outside your field; this should include a statement of the specific problem you addressed (your piece of the overall puzzle), and why it was important enough to

consume so many years of your time. Remember that English will be a second language for some of the audience; speak sloooooowly and dis-tinct-ly.

- **Provide only highlights of methodology:** Remember you will be presenting your work to those outside your field. Don't describe your method; instead, explain how those in your study area acquire the needed data. For example, if you are a modeler, talk about where modelers like you get the information that feeds into the model and the limitations imposed by that method. If a social scientist, talk in general terms about how those in your field collect and analyze data and the constraints imposed by the method. Skip the details – just a short description for those outside your field. This should consume less than one minute of your time. Refer them to your poster for details or tell them to contact you individually if interested.
- **Summarize results and focus on their** significance in the context of climate change and its impacts. In other words, what did you discover and why should anyone care.
- **Describe your current work and plans for the future.**

Some of you have been “out” for a couple of years and are now bored with your thesis work. You are free to spend less of the allotted time on your dissertation research and more of the allotted time on current work, so long as you stay under the 8 minutes-maximum rule and make at least passing reference to your thesis work...

### Using PowerPoint effectively

Minimum font size should be 24 - 30. A sans-serif font, like Arial or Helvetica is easiest to read. Aim for ~1 slide per minute (8 total for your talk). Even if you think that some of them will only take you 10 seconds to get through, others will take 2 minutes to cover in sufficient detail. Only include 1-3 points per slide. Filling slides with lots of text becomes confusing to the audience. Use 2 slides if necessary to get all of your points (or conclusions) across. Give each slide a meaningful title so that the audience can orient themselves to the message you're trying to convey on each particular slide.

Cartoons or pictures will often convey your message much more effectively than a graph with data. Even data conclusions can be illustrated with colored shadings on a map. If you use a map, make sure to include a larger scale map so that others can easily locate the region of interest. Use phrases in bulleted lists instead of whole sentences to get your points across. Voice your major points in complete sentences, but show only the most important words on the slides. Use strong contrast between your text color and background. For example, white or yellow text on a dark blue or black background. Colors look very different on a computer screen than projected, so be sure to project your presentation before finalizing the background and font colors.

Remember, the 8-minutes-maximum rule. A good rule of thumb for any talk is no more than ***one slide per minute***, so don't plan on more than 8 slides; less is more in this context! You can refer the audience to your poster and bring copies of your latest papers or other documents if you want to provide details.

## **Speaking**

Practice your talk in front of peers or colleagues. Your peers will help you to identify poor graphics, unclear jargon or acronyms, and bad habits (e.g., saying “ummm,” looking at the floor). The scariest way to give a talk is to an empty room – no feedback! So try that at home with no audience if you are nervous. Be sure to preview your talk on using a projector to see whether it is readable from the back of a room capable of holding an audience of 50 people that is dimly lit. Be sure you can make this presentation in less than 8 minutes speaking slowly.

Many people suggest writing out and practicing your first few sentences and your last few sentences to ensure you capture your audience’s attention and leave them with the important take-home message(s). Speak louder and clearer and slower than you would think is necessary. Keep in mind it is an international group so you need to talk more slowly than you would otherwise. This goes for informal discussions as well as your presentation. Know what slide is coming next. It will help with transition and allow you to address your audience instead of constantly turning and speaking to the screen.

Use the pointer sparingly. If you are nervous (or over-caffeinated), a laser pointer will wiggle all over the screen. To avoid this, use both hands and hold the pointer near your body.

When answering questions, listen to the entire question without interrupting the person. If you don’t understand the question, ask them to rephrase it. Get in the habit of repeating the question for the audience. You should also take a moment to consider your answer without hastily blurting it out. The most effective answers often contain examples and implications. It is also a good idea to get a friend or colleague to write down the questions that you’ve been asked because you might not remember them later, or you will want to think about them some more. Keep your answers short and to the point since time is very limited.

**For those of you who would like more guidance** than provided here, visit:

[http://www.biogeek.com/pages/presentation\\_hints&tips.html](http://www.biogeek.com/pages/presentation_hints&tips.html). If that is not sufficient, there is a long list of resources at <http://marcus.whitman.edu/~weilercs/TalkingTips/>

### **POSTER PRESENTATIONS:**

- Limit your presentation to a 4-foot by 4-foot space (1.22 x 1.22 m).
- Make the title and abstract informative, even to the non-specialist.
- The poster text should tell a complete story with a beginning (introduction/background sufficient to explain it to those not in your specific area of expertise; be sure to avoid jargon), middle (enough on materials and methods so that readers can understand what you have done, followed by your main results) and end (main conclusions and significance/relevance).
- If you have room in your suitcase, feel free to bring reprints of papers or a hand-out. You can pile these at the base of your poster. This is not required.

Video equipment will NOT be available on site for poster presentations.

### **RESOURCES FOR PREPARING TALKS AND POSTERS**

[http://tos.org/resources/publications/sci\\_speaking.html](http://tos.org/resources/publications/sci_speaking.html)

Provides many useful tips on preparing oral and poster presentations.

<http://www.swarthmore.edu/NatSci/cpurrin1/posteradvice.htm>

Includes a template for preparing posters using a single PowerPoint image. This resource is particularly valuable for those participants who work in fields in which poster presentations are not common, but we expect all of you will find it useful.

For those of you in fields that do not use posters, most universities or local printing businesses should have a printer that can cheaply print one 4-foot x 4-foot poster.

The above sources should provide more than you will possibly need to know. Additional resources are available at <http://discrs.org/reports/talkingtips.html>