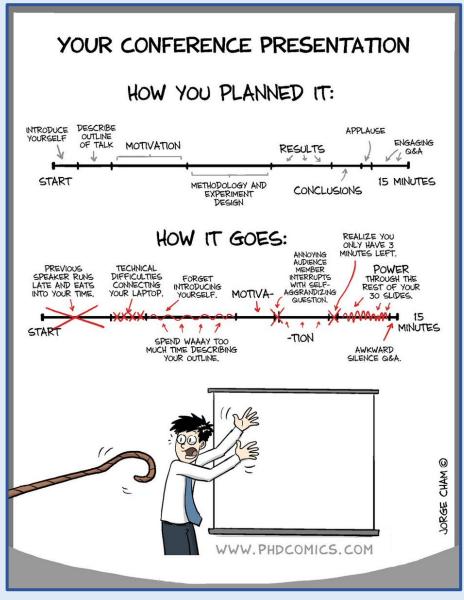# Tell Your Research Story

Profile page:

https://www.geog.ucl.ac.uk/people/academic-staff/eloise-marais

Lab Website:

https://maraisresearchgroup.co.uk/presentations.html

Why Communicate Research Effectively?

Convey relevance of your research.
Why is what you do important? What do you do all day in the lab?

Increase impact of your research.
Communicating your research to potential end users in an accessible way increases its application beyond academia.

Inspire next generation of researchers.
If we explain concepts, ideas, findings clearly and enthusiastically, we increase appeal and passion to pursue a career in research.

Curtail misinformation.
Miscommunication has consequences.
Need to curtail proliferation of fake news.

Funding.
If funding agencies and grant reviewers don't understand your research, you won't get funded.

Typical Academic Presentations

Elevator Pitch / Introduction / Roundtable (< 5 min).
Inspire further discussion, invest in your research, identify opportunities for collaboration (**2-3 slides**).

PhD Upgrade (15-20 min).
Indicate how your PhD will evolve based on what you've done so far (**1-2 slides per minute**).

Conference (15-20 min).
New research to garner interest, get feedback, motivate discussions during networking (**1-2 slides per minute**).

Research Seminar (40-45 min).
New research with published research sprinkled in the introduction to advertise what you've done previously. (**1-3 slides per minute**).

Celebration Talk (1 h).
Broad and very accessible to a diverse audience. Dominated by published work and contribution made to advancing knowledge. (**1-3 slides per minute**).

Funding / Job Interview (highly variable).
Often very prescribed by funder. Convince them that money will be well spent.

You as The Storyteller

Know Your Audience.

Your audience determines how to pitch the talk: material/jargon/acronyms/detail to present or avoid, how much background to provide.

Pitch your talk to the most junior member of your audience (e.g. Master's or 1st year graduate student, or researchers outside the field).

Remember, you've been working on this topic for months / years, but for most of your audience this is the first time they are interacting with the topic.

Tell A Story. Take your audience on a (your) journey.

The presentation should have the structure of a captivating story:

- Set the scene (background)
- The buildup (materials and methods)
- The climax (results: moment of revelation)
- The denouement (final outcome, relevance and impact)

Make it relatable/personal

Surprise the audience, upend expectations

Evidence that it works: https://www.npr.org/2020/08/18/903545336/the-science-behind-storytelling

You as The Storyteller (contd)

Body Language.

Convey enthusiasm. If you don't show interest in your topic, the audience certainly won't.

Practice Makes Better.

Practice your talk <u>at least once</u> before presenting to keep on time, reduce nerves, gain familiarity with the content, and ensure the talk has flow and cohesion.

Record yourself and play it back to identify and eliminate nervous twitches and bad/odd habits.

You're in command.

Audiences are generally polite. But, if you do encounter someone who persistently interrupts, take control by suggesting a more in-depth discussion after the talk.

Keep on Time.

Stick to the allotted time. Don't annoy your audience by going over. Practicing the talk prevents this.

Nerves.

Inevitable! Let the nervous energy work for you. If you use a pointer, don't let it convey nerves (dance around the screen).

Technology.

Test relevant technology (Zoom/Teams) beforehand to make sure it works and that it's familiar.

Answering Questions

A sign of a good talk is if the audience asks questions. Relish this!

- A skill that develops with practice, so take advantage of every opportunity to present.

- Know your topic well to avoid the embarrassment of saying "I don't know!" or fumbling through an incoherent answer if you don't have one.

- When asked a question, thank the audience member for the question.

- If you're not quite sure what an audience member is asking or the rest of the audience may not have heard the question, repeat the question before answering. This also gives you time to think through a coherent answer.

- Keep answers brief and on topic so that there's time for more questions.

Slides: Formatting Guidelines

- Less is more. Keep slides simple to convey the main message.

- Use a plain background. Avoid Microsoft slide templates or institutional headers.

- Keep text to a minimum and only use when absolutely necessary.

- Avoid bullet points (unlike this talk!). Images are more engaging and reinforce what you have to say.

- My rule-of-thumb is that text should only occupy ~10% of the slide (except the Conclusions/Summary slide). The rest should be images.

- Use 18+ font size for text (sometimes need to use smaller font sizes for figures).

- Use Arial-equivalent font types. Avoid decorative fonts, like Times New Roman, that are hard to see.

- Animated slides are fine, but keep to a minimum. If overused, these can be distracting and frustrating.

Slides: Formatting Guidelines (contd)

- Videos or GIFs can be effective, but have a backup plan if these don't work.

- Each slide must deliver a message and the message must be clear (indicate with take-home message and/or slide title).

- Know <u>everything</u> you've added to the slide. Anticipate questions from the audience and be ready to answer these.

- Acknowledge data/literature sources and contributors. Shows collegiality and diligence.

- Avoid reading your slides or preparing and reading off a script. Risks being dull and monotonous. Practicing and having minimal text on slides reduces reliance on these. Better to forget to say something than to be a bore to listen to.

- Avoid **acronyms**. If you must use these, define on first use.

Slides: Typical Sequence

Title → Introduction → Research → Conclusions

Title (Handshake) Slide:

- Introduces you and your talk to the audience

- Should include the talk title, your name and contact details, names of contributors, and a catchy image/GIF/video.

- Opportunity to also thank the chair for inviting you (if this is an invited talk)