

Increasing Your Presentation's Impact at the PNW Climate Science Conference

At past conferences, several attendees commented that the talks were not sufficiently accessible to our broad audience. Feedback included the following: “Many speakers had way too many slides and often complex slides for the time slots”; “The conference was too scientifically technical”; “Speakers need to have it drilled into their heads that they are not only speaking to their expert colleagues but also to nonscientists and to scientists from other disciplines.” These quotes underscore how important it is to think of this conference differently.

Presentations that are clear, concise, and understandable to the conference's diverse audience are central to the success of the conference and, ultimately, central to successful integration of climate research into decision making.

The following guidelines will help your work have the most impact with the conference's wide-ranging audience. Presenters are asked to prepare their presentations with these guidelines in mind.

Consider the Audience

The audience includes managers, researchers, scientists (most of whom come from fields besides your own), students, and the concerned public with varying levels of knowledge, but all with a strong interest in regional issues related to climate impacts and adaptation.

- **Keep it simple and concise:** Keep your talk at a high level – but not dumbed-down – and appeal to others outside of your specialty who may not understand *all* the science, but who still want to understand the impact of your work.
- **Limit your slides:** Limit your slides to no more than 15 slides total. More slides than that will probably frustrate the audience and lessen the impact of your talk.
- **Start with the motivation:** Why should anyone care about your research?
- **Avoid technical jargon:** Use of technical jargon makes it harder for the audience to understand the work and know how to apply it. If you must use a technical term, explain the term.
- **Avoid unnecessary detail:** Focus on your core, big-picture questions and findings, avoiding unnecessary detail.
- **Conclude with your main message:** You should be able to explain the significance of your findings at the end of the presentation in ONE BRIEF SENTENCE.
- **Practice your presentation:** Consider recording yourself giving the presentation. Make sure you can fit the talk into the allotted time and think about how to improve the pace and flow.

Consider the Format and Setting

Oral presentations are different from published journal articles.

- **Focus on a few big ideas:** Focus on communicating a few big ideas clearly and effectively rather than trying to run through a multitude of points that can distract from the major points you want to make.
- **Go light on methods:** Experts who are interested can ask you more about them later. Most of the audience is more concerned with your work's overall findings and implications.
- **Point to more sources:** Give your audience links or suggestions for further inquiry.

The conference will be held in a large room where people will have other distractions.

- **Time limits will be enforced:** Concurrent session presentations are 15 minutes + 5 minutes for audience Q&A.
- **Limit your use of words on the slides:** Use uncluttered slides with little text; the slides should summarize what you're saying, not act as a script
- **Avoid "horrendographs":** Make your figures as large as possible, convey a clear message, and easy to understand, with all axes and data well labeled. Test figures on a colleague not from your field.
- **Think of the audience in the last row:** Make sure all of your slides can be read from the back of the room. To test for legibility, stand back 6' from a 13" monitor or 11' from a 24" monitor. This will give you a sense of how the audience will see your slides.

Need More Tips?

The following short videos and articles are also strongly recommended:

- "Don't Be Such a Scientist: Talking Substance in an Age of Style" (~3 minute video): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XjaTDA-9_sk
- 4 Scientific Reasons Why Your PowerPoint Presentation Sucks (and the 2 Tips You Need to Fix It) (~3 minute video): <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eLGLtnRopJM>
- "Communicating the Science of Climate Change" (Somerville and Hassol 2011, *Physics Today*): <http://climatecommunication.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/Somerville-Hassol-Physics-Today-2011.pdf>
- Garr Reynolds' Professional Presentation Tips: <http://www.garreynolds.com/preso-tips/design>
- TEDx Tips: http://www.ted.com/pages/tedx_presentation_design