

Tips for Communicating with a Lay Audience

It's not just about your science; it's about the field.

- Be an ambassador for Alzheimer's or geriatrics or women's health research.
- Explain the economic and personal costs of the disease to which your research is related.
- Explain some of the hopeful advances the field has made to date and describe their clinical relevance.
- Put your project in the context of what else is going on.

It's not just about your science; it's about you.

- Who are you?
- Why did you become a scientist? What is it like?
- Why did you pursue this discipline or question?
- Why is the work you do important to you and to the wider world?

If you have the time to talk/write about your science, explain the biology step by step.

- Start with the basics ("This is a cell.") and then burrow down.
- Use visual aids and simple pictures that describe the process you are studying.
- Define all scientific terms; explain all acronyms.

Check your jargon at the door.

- Not "apoptosis," but "how cells die."
- You probably can't get too basic. Remember, 1/3 of Americans don't know what a molecule is.

Check your slides.

- Three bullets or less per slide.
- Keep the text short. Is there a visual you can speak about instead?
- Keep all charts and graphs simple to "read" and quickly understand.
- Gels are pretty, but make sure the uninitiated can discern what is really relevant.

Be a student of good writing and speaking on science.

- Read the science sections of major newspapers like *The New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *USA Today*, etc.
- Study the presentation of good speakers.

Remember the basics of good writing.

- Use active, not passive verbs and construction.
- Use concrete, descriptive language.
- Use metaphors ("dime-sized" rather than 1.5 CM).
- Tell anecdotes and case histories.
- When appropriate, stray towards a more conversational tone.
- Develop a strong lead.

Remember the basics of good speaking.

- Know your audience (and their knowledge of science).
- Know the room and venue.
- Limit your messages and repeat them.
- Try to get out from behind the podium, so you can connect with the audience.
- Tell a story or two that carry your message or explain key points.
- Start and end strong. Make your introduction and conclusion sing.
- Don't forget to speak clearly and to vary your tone to create interest.
- Practice.

Get to know the basics for writing on the Web.

- Brevity is key. (Will this fit on a single screen?)
- Use headlines and sub-headlines to guide your reader through longer text.
- Know your audience (and write to the least knowledgeable person likely to read the page).
- Keep it simple and depend on links to allow readers to burrow deeper.
- Where possible, provide links to other research and resources.
- Encourage interactivity (e.g., make sure there is a way for people to contact you via e-mail).

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