

Guidelines for Presenting to an Interdisciplinary Audience

For IUSF members

Rationale for these guidelines

IUSF is an interdisciplinary institute; the groups that comprise the institute have different backgrounds (e.g., math, ecology, social sciences). The guidance offered here is intended to help make your presentations to your colleagues here or elsewhere understandable, interesting and useful. Everyone is capable of understanding your research if it is presented well.

Criteria for a presentation

The IUSF research seminars provide us with the opportunity to:

- learn what other people/groups are doing
- learn something new
- exchange on topics of mutual interest
- look for linkages referring to research activities and/or methods
- obtain feedback from a wide audience and reflect on one's own work
- improve presentation skills (or prepare for a conference presentation)

Therefore, presentations should:

- reflect the level of understanding of your audience
- be clear, concise and well organised
- communicate the goal of the talk
- provide the wider context - how and why this research/theme
- be understandable (so that questions can be posed)
- describe methods and results briefly or in detail if appropriate for the audience
- link back to the context at the end to demonstrate the purpose
- stimulate constructive feedback
- stimulate group interaction

An Interdisciplinary Science

Environmental science is referred to as an interdisciplinary field because it incorporates information and ideas from multiple disciplines. Within the natural sciences, it includes fields such as biology, chemistry, and geology. What makes environmental science such a complex and broad field is that it also includes fields from the social sciences and the humanities: geography, economics, and political science, anthropology, sociology, philosophy and ethics. Source: <http://study.com/academy/lesson/what-is-environmental-science-definition-and-scope-of-the-field.html>

General guidelines for preparing and presenting

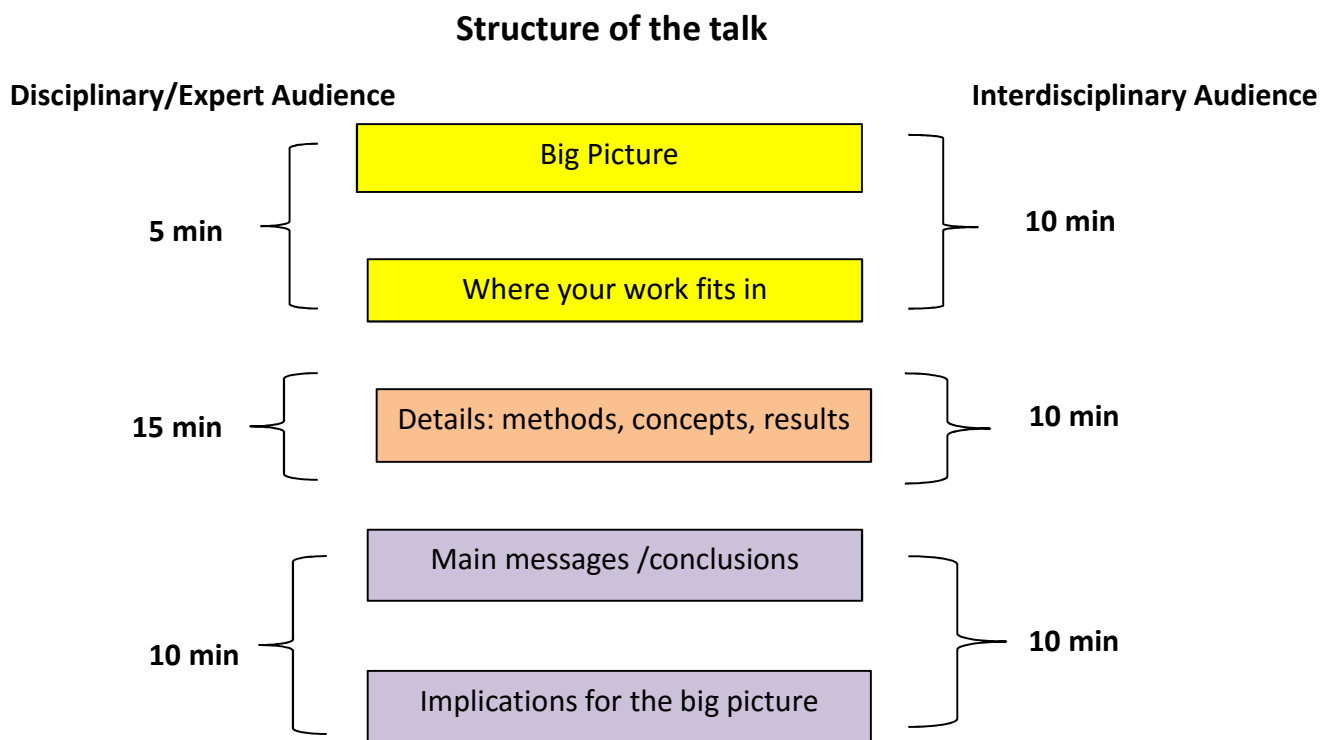
1) Limit the length of your presentation to **maintain interest** and **allow time for questions and discussion**, particularly topics/issues for which you would like feedback – (Typically one has a maximum of **15-20 mins** to present at a conference so it is good practice to make it shorter).

2) Explain **why** you decided to study the topic being presented, why it matters, how your topic presenting fits in to the **bigger picture**, what **the objectives/purpose** of the research you are presenting are, and what you want to **share** with the audience.

- 3) Provide a **framework or a roadmap for understanding** that makes it easier for the audience to organise the information you provide.
- 4) Use **simple language**; avoid long, complicated sentences.
- 5) **Engage and involve your audience**. Provoke their interest with questions.
- 6) Demonstrate how the **knowledge gained can be applied to real-world problems**.
- 7) Describe **the challenges and difficulties** you encountered.
- 8) Highlight any **discoveries that surprised you**. If you had an “ah hah!” moment when you suddenly understood the significance of (a part of) your work, describe it.
- 9) Conclude by telling your audience **what you discovered and why it is significant**. Reflect on its **value to research but also for practice and/or policy**.

Adapted from: <http://www.columbia.edu/cu/tat/pdfs/presentations1.pdf>

The following figure is a guide for structuring your presentation: on the left for an audience of colleagues from the same discipline and on the right for an interdisciplinary audience. Clearly there is some flexibility in this. For example, in some instances the methodology may be of common interest to all participants (e.g. modelling). In other cases, the implications of your results is more interesting to the audience.



A final tip:

Do a time check – assume a minimum presentation time of 1 minute per slide and do a trial run. Have a colleague from a different discipline review your slides or listen to your presentation beforehand to confirm clarity.