



Best Practices for Giving Public Presentations

As a specialist in your field, you are probably very familiar with lecturing to students and presenting at conferences. Public communication can provide different challenges as well as rewards. Our regular surveys of the public audiences at “CU On The Weekend” seminars have generated many years of feedback about what works well or less well in these settings. Whether you are new to or have experience giving public talks, we recommend reviewing the following tips as you prepare for your presentation.

Preparing and delivering the talk:

- Grab the audience’s attention in the first 30 seconds. Use a startling statistic or image, an interesting anecdote or a concise quotation.
- Tailor the content, length and style of the presentation to the audience’s interests and demographics. Ask for information about your audience in advance if it’s not provided.
- Describe the key background for your topic, using terms, images and connections that people can relate to everyday life. Although this may seem redundant for some, it will be essential for others, and will establish a shared baseline for all.
- Be sure your talk covers the “What, where, who, how and why” of your work.
- Identify and emphasize the key messages that you want the audience to take away from your presentation. Keep these in mind while preparing and delivering the talk, so they don’t become obscured by extensive detail.
- Convey a personal perspective. In contrast to the conventions in most academic disciplines, speakers in public settings establish credibility if they allow their personality to shine through. Your audience will trust what you have to say if they can see you as a real person.
- Interact with the audience. Ask brief questions to gauge their prior experience, interest, and understanding. Monitor reactions, adjust your message if needed, and stay flexible. Attendees will tune out if you read extensively from slides, notes, or long sections of a publication.
- Use humor and tell stories (if appropriate). Public audiences are much more engaged when a presentation includes brief anecdotes and personal experiences. They are often curious about the speaker’s pathway in their field and career.

- Use language that a general audience will understand. While some of the audience members may be college educated, not everyone will be; very few will have a working knowledge of your field and terminology. Minimize and explain acronyms or 'jargon'.
- Remember that you represent the University of Colorado Boulder. If you are speaking off-campus, please spend a few minutes giving an overview of the university. PowerPoint slides with key information about the university are available for your use.
- Speak clearly, slowly, and loudly. Some audiences at outreach events may be older and have difficulty hearing, and you may not always have a sound system available. Please use a microphone if available.
- Conclude your presentation with a summary or strong statement that your audience will remember.
- Be prepared for lengthy questions and comments; if many come up during the talk, consider suggesting they be saved for a designated discussion session at the end.
- Use a feedback form, or ideally a post-event survey form, so you can learn from your audiences what they most appreciated, what they'd like to know more about, etc.

PowerPoint Tips:

- Avoid cluttered slides that people can't read. Keep to a maximum of six words per line and six lines per slide. You want to make sure the audience is listening to you and following your key points, instead of trying to decipher dense material on your slides.
- Use high-quality graphics to help tell your story.
- Include short, easy-to-read captions for photographs and graphics.
- Use only one graph/figure/table per slide, and make sure they are simple and clear.
- Highlight 1-3 main points per figure, rather than describing the details of your data or the figures themselves.
- Avoid equations unless they are simple and can be easily explained.
- Have a visual theme.
- Include the official CU Boulder logo and your department's CU Boulder logo on the bottom of the first and last slide (or on all slides if feasible.)
- Maintain visual consistency. Font type, size and color should not vary among slides.

- We strongly recommend you use Helvetica Neue font (CU Boulder's official font) in black. Avoid colored text. Use font sizes that are 24-point or larger.

We hope that you enjoy the experience of giving your public talk, and we appreciate your willingness to share your work in this setting and represent CU Boulder!