Women in Biological Sciences: How to Give a Presentation (4/29/19)

Slide Organization and Format:

* The most effective way to illustrate your points is to use an assertion-evidence format, in which the headline of the slide states its message, and the figure or bullet points provide evidence for this statement.
* Elaborate or gimmicky transitions should be avoided, since they distract from the overall presentation (strive for minimalism and clarity).
* Modify figures from papers: if necessary, replace axes and fonts so that they can be easily read by the audience. Change them to suit slides and exclude any information that you do not discuss in the presentation.
* Make sure you discuss everything on each slide: use text build-ins to avoid omitting one of your main points.
* Leave margins with extra space so that nothing is accidentally cut off by the projector. Use pdf files to avoid any problems with graphics.
* Make sure the color scheme is color-blind friendly: don’t use red and green!

Delivery:

* Introduce yourself and your organization at the beginning of the talk.
* Make eye contact. Ignore audience members who are falling asleep or not paying attention; find sympathetic listeners and talk to them.
* At the beginning, establish the context or your research and indicate why it is interesting and important.
* For longer talks, include an outline slide after the introduction and refer to it periodically to keep the audience on track and guide them through the presentation
* Remember that you are telling the audience a story: make sure your presentation has a narrative arc. Outline the methods used to obtain the observed results, then discuss the meaning of those results.
* Touch lightly on methodological and technical details, unless using a little-known method or one that is crucial for understanding the study.
* Walk the audience through each figure.
* At the end of your talk, summarize the results and end with a declarative statement about the main findings of your study and their importance. Follow with an Acknowledgements slide, then thank the audience before beginning the Q and A session.
* Rather than using an ending slide with “Thank you” or “Questions?”, your final slide after the Acknowledgements slide should be a repeat of the summary of your study, so that you and the audience can refer to it during the Q and A session.

Practicing:

* Rehearse aloud while standing (preferably in front of a friend or small audience who can give advice and constructive criticism). If a practice audience is not available, use a mirror.
* Record a practice talk so that you can listen to yourself. Pay particular attention to your tone, which should be enthusiastic, conversational, and varied.
* Use presenter notes while practicing (but train yourself not to rely on them). If there are particular places where you tend to get stuck, have notes available during the presentation in case you need them.
* For the presentation itself, choose an outfit with a collar or lapel on which a microphone can be clipped and a pocket or belt in which the pack can be placed.

Answering questions:

* Repeat or paraphrase the question to make sure you understand what is being asked.
* Don’t be afraid to admit that you don’t know the answer.
* Encourage people to find you after the presentation to follow-up on a question if a complete answer or explanation requires more time.

General things to avoid:

* Reading from slides.
* Going over time: it is disrespectful to the audience!