

Tips for Guest Speakers

Know your audience

The more you know about your audience, the better you can adapt your presentation to their interests. Keep in mind the diversity of your audience's experience and backgrounds. Remember that many visitors attend in family groups, which can include a wide range of ages.

Keep the message simple

Come up with one "big idea" you want the audience to take away from the experience, and make sure your presentation reiterates and reinforces this idea in different ways. Define your terms, avoiding jargon and acronyms as much as possible. Check in with your audience periodically to see if they're following you.

Use familiar analogies

Use comparisons to everyday experiences. Explain how the topic relates to something that's been in the news or in popular culture.

Use relative size and scale

Focus on relative size and scale rather than exact measurements. Consider using parts of the human body to explain relative scale.

Use visuals

Simple images and models will reinforce and clarify your message.

Use several modes of presentation

In addition to talking, you can include demonstrations, videos, and pictures. You can involve the audience by providing objects to pass around, asking questions, doing brief experiments, providing hands-on activities, and playing games.

Involve the audience in the processes of science

Encourage your audience to observe, predict, and explore by asking them questions: "What do you think will happen when . . . ?" "Were you surprised?" "Why do you think that happened?" "What if you tried . . . ?" "Can you think of any practical uses for this?" "What about unintended consequences?"

Be friendly and approachable

Remember to make eye contact, smile, and let the audience know who you are. If you're a scientist, consider including personal stories about your work life and your career decisions.

Be prepared to answer common questions

But don't be afraid to let your audience know if you don't know the answer to their question.

Share ways to learn more

Remember that your presentation is only one exposure that people will have to this topic—it's not the end of their learning. Help the audience connect to other opportunities for more exploration.