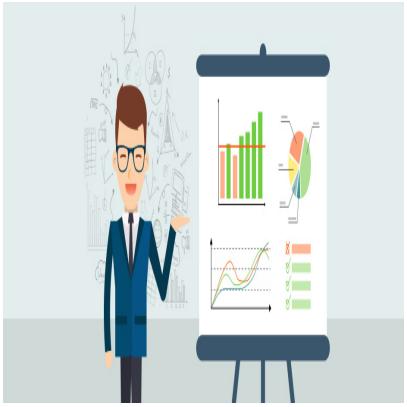


Description

For maximum impact research results should be presented in an understandable and a memorable fashion. Oral presentations present a special challenge since they make much greater demands on a listener's attention and memory. When reading a research paper, the reader can re-read difficult sections over and over and refer back to earlier sections by turning a page. A listener can't do this. He must understand what you tell him the first time he hears it. He must also stay awake during the whole lecture, which can be a challenge if the speaker drones on in a boring manner. A presenter will greatly improve his audience's understanding of the material and attention span if he tells a story.

A Mystery!

No literary form is more popular and engaging than the mystery, the detective story. Most research projects are detective stories—perhaps you are trying to elucidate the mechanism of a phenomenon. That's a mystery. You, the researcher are the detective, solving the mystery of why the observation occurred. Experiments were carried out, gradually paring down the list of suspects to the responsible party. Were there unexpected findings along the way? So much the better. These are like the twists and turns of a detective novel, challenges that serve to make the ultimate denouncement more impressive and satisfying. During a rehearsal of one of my graduate student seminars my adviser commented, "I think you should build up the suspense a little. Make it more dramatic." He was right. In the hands of a master storyteller a scientific presentation can be not only informative by entertaining.

To Boldly Go Where No One Has Gone Before

Of course, not all research projects fit the mystery genera. Some are more like adventure stories—the intrepid explorer going off into the unknown, contending with great difficulties, vying to be the first to climb the mountain, plumb the depths, or discover the lost continent. A synthesis project may be an adventure in which the researcher tries to be the first to make a certain compound: perhaps a novel structure he dreamed up, perhaps a natural product never made by man, perhaps a well known complicated structure that needs to be made in fewer steps or a higher yield. In any case, getting from start to finish can involve a bit of drama, enough to make the story more interesting and memorable.

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Category

1. Career Corner
2. PhDs & Postdocs

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