The “Cocktail Party” Talk

**Scenario:** You’re at a social event and someone asks you about your research.

**The challenge:** You need to explain your work in way that engages a non-specialist audience – and quickly, because attention spans are short at parties. If you’re boring, you’ll be left standing by yourself talking to the potted shrub. If you’re captivating, you’ll win friends and help educate others about science.

**Some tips:**

- Consider what is really cool about your work. It might be something you take for granted such as holding a live bird in your hands or amplifying a specific gene.
- Think about your work’s applications to the real world.
- Highlight your experimental organism or model system.
- Ditch the technical jargon and especially the acronyms.
- Emphasize the big picture goals of the research program before describing your particular project.
- Look for the human interest angle. What attracts you to the research? Can you think of any surprising, funny, or thrilling anecdotes from your work?
- Consider using analogies to describe technical details. For example, maybe your research instrument is “like an old fashioned record player, except spinning at 10,000 revolutions per minute.”
- Keep it short – maybe 2-3 minutes max – if your audience is still with you, they’ll ask questions.