

Kenyon College Natural Science Division
Summer Communication Groups
Week 1 – Short talks

Objective: Students start to learn how to effectively talk about their research to non-scientists.

Main activity: Role-playing exercises that ask students to talk about their work in different contexts.

Toolkit:

- Role-playing scenarios
 - Thanksgiving. Everyone is drowsy after a big meal. Imagine that your uncle asks you about your research. Describe your work in a way that keeps everyone from falling asleep.
 - Cocktail party. You're at a cocktail party and someone you're interested in asks you about your research. If you don't say something interesting in the first 60 seconds, your crush is going to walk away and join another conversation. Or, imagine that a member of the Kenyon Board of Trustees ask you about your research at a cocktail party.
 - Elevator. You're at a conference and one of the leading researchers in the field steps onto the hotel elevator with you. You have until the 30th floor to pitch your work in a way that might land you a position in her lab.
 - Kindergarten class. Your local elementary school asks you to talk about your work to their kindergarteners. Better say something interesting or you'll become a paper airplane target.
- Extensions
 - Involve the listeners
 - Require listeners to ask questions
 - Ask listeners to repeat what the speaker said
 - Play the telephone game – X tells Y, Y tells Z, Z tells X.
 - Pairs brainstorm “hooks”
 - Ask students to contemplate how context affects what they say
 - Audience
 - Purpose of the communication
 - Format – poster, chalktalk, powerpoint, etc.
 - Discuss tactics for making a short oral talk engaging
 - Use a personalized style
 - Make the motivation clear
 - Why this project?
 - What do you like about doing science?
 - Use analogies, especially gut-level or real-life ones
 - Use humor and irony
 - Discuss incidents and anecdotes
 - Tell a story using classic storytelling motifs (heroes, villains, etc)
 - Discuss real world applications
 - Ask questions to engage the audience
 - Discuss the history of your line of work
 - Show an artifact or object or visual aid
 - Sell a bigger story that matters to you (i.e. the environment or health)

Developed by Kenyon College faculty with support from the GLCA New Directions Initiative and the Kenyon College Provost's Office.