

## Theme Session S

### Presenting scientific and advisory results: best practices

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Theme Session S attempted to raise awareness and skills within the ICES-community on good presentation delivery, both for scientific and non-scientific audiences. A good presentation is one that is worthwhile for the audience to attend: one that brings a message across in an effective way. After all, in an ASC we spend about 10.000 hours together in lecture theatres listening to each other – so it better be worth while! It was an interactive session, in which conveners, contributors and participants in the audience discussed and commented on what makes a good presentation.

Presentations on presenting from the conveners were interlaced with three presentations from contributors and three fragments from internet videos of presentations. The presentations and items were not scheduled into separate time-slots. About half of the time had been reserved for discussion – and this happened not only between the presentations but the audience also interrupted speakers, if they needed clarification. We had asked the audience to come and sit in the front of the (large) conference room. Together with the active moderation of the discussion by the conveners this created a lively atmosphere with a very active participation of the audience in the discussions. The group dynamics and open atmosphere that resulted made it possible that such feedback was received that is normally left unsaid. It was clear that everybody – the conveners, the contributors, and the participants – learned something from the session.

Figures 1 and 2. Some impressions of the theme session



We discovered that authentic story telling and mindful consideration of the audience form the key to a good presentation. Since this can only be done in personal way and since people can have their own individual styles it would be impossible to formulate 'guidelines'. But we did reach some degree of consensus on the following points.

- Focus the presentation on one clear key message. Focus on what the audience would like to know about your research or your findings.
- Consider background, level of understanding, native language (etc.) as well as the diversity of the audience. Adjust the pace of the talk and the level of (technical) detail that the audience is interested in accordingly.
- Unless you are a natural talent, rehearse out loud (many times); it helps to acquire confidence and to be sure that the presentation fits into the allotted time.
- Reading sentences from the slides is experienced as unpleasant by the audience and makes it difficult for the audience to concentrate and follow the talk.
- Large amounts of text on the slides are distracting and uninviting. We are concerned with presentations that are delivered *orally* and therefore the text on the slides should be reduced to a minimum, sometimes only one word.
- The main function of the slides should be the combination of a few key words of text for focus and a visualization (picture, graph, diagram) to illustrate subjects, concepts or display results.
- Less = More. Minimize the amount of information on a slide. Don't display unnecessary information. Empty slides focus the attention of the audience to the story teller.
- In case a slide has to be complex, take your time to explain to the audience what is on the slide (remember: they have never seen it before), and guide their focus to specific items, either verbally or through the use of a laser pointer, an old-fashioned stick, or any of the numerous features within powerpoint (circles or arrows, highlights, the fading in or out of items, etc.). *The group experienced that it can really actually happen that half of the audience does not have a clue what the speaker is talking about because of insufficient explanation.*
- Some people are more visually oriented than others.
- Don't forget that 5-10% of men are red-green colour blind.

We received a lot of positive feedback on the session (even from people who had not attended). We think it is a good idea to repeat this type of skills-session in future ASCs.

Internet sites used:

<http://www.presentationzen.com/>

[http://www.ted.com/index.php/talks/bonnie\\_bassler\\_on\\_how\\_bacteria\\_communicate.html](http://www.ted.com/index.php/talks/bonnie_bassler_on_how_bacteria_communicate.html)

[http://www.ted.com/index.php/talks/hans\\_rosling\\_shows\\_the\\_best\\_stats\\_you\\_ve\\_ever\\_seen.html](http://www.ted.com/index.php/talks/hans_rosling_shows_the_best_stats_you_ve_ever_seen.html)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cagxPIVqrtM&feature=related>

<http://www.geol.wvu.edu/rjmitch/stoning.pdf>