

2024 Grad Thesis SLAM

Preparation Series:

Engaging Your Audience & Telling a Compelling Story

February 29, 2024



UNIVERSITY
of VIRGINIA

PhD**Plus**

Session Overview



PhD**Plus**



Competition Timeline

Preparation Series | Thursdays at 3:00 pm

- What is the Grad Thesis SLAM & How Do I Get Started? | Today (60 mins.)
- Engaging Your Audience & Telling a Compelling Story | Feb. 29 (virtual; 90 mins.)
- Slide Design & Presentation Skills | Mar. 14 (virtual; 90 mins.)
- Practice Your Presentation & Receive Peer Feedback | Mar. 21 or 22 (in person; 90 mins.)

Preliminary Rounds | April 1 - 5, times will be announced soon!

Grad Thesis SLAM - Final Competition | April 16

<https://phdplus.virginia.edu/2024-grad-thesis-slam>

Timeline Recap

Session 2 | (today)






- Reflect on your graduate work—big picture, issue(s), etc.
- Why should your audience care?

Session 3 | (Mar. 14)

- Outline your research story and draft a script.
 - Focus on your hook and takeaway message.
- Create or sketch out a rough of your slide.

Session 4 | (Mar. 21 & 22)

- Finalize your script and a solid draft of your slide.

Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri
12	13	14	15	16
19	20	21	22	23
26	27	28	29 	Mar 1
4	5	6	7	8
Spring Break				
11	12	13	14 	15
18	19	20	21 	22 
25	26	27	28	29
Apr 1	2	3	4	5
Preliminary Competition				
8	9	10	11	12
15	16  • GTS	17	18	19

How to Get Started

What we asked you to think about last time:

- Why should your audience care about your graduate work?
 - Take a satellite view of your research, how does it connect to others, relate to current events, pop culture, etc.
- What is the Big Picture problem, issue, or unknown aspect you are addressing?
- What is something about your research that is not obvious to someone outside your discipline?



Grad Thesis SLAM Audience

- Who are they?
- What do they already know?
- How do they get their information?
- What are their beliefs and interests?

- Well-educated
- University community
- Local community
- Friends and family



How to Engage Your Audience

- Humans are curious by nature - *engage their curiosity*
- We remember and share experiences through stories.
- Think about your: words, visuals, and performance.
 - How do they complement each other?
- It is easier to learn *new* information by building upon your current knowledge.
 - Connect what you do to the framework of knowledge and experiences of your audience.



What's Your Paradigm?

Everything you know and understand about your field of expertise colors how you think and communicate it.

- Core scientific knowledge, historical background, critical debates
- Acronyms
- Jargon & technical terms



Activity: *Communicating Research Terms*

Let's practice simplifying our jargon.

STEPS

1. Pick one word from your discipline that you would not expect the audience to know.
2. Share it in the chat and include:
 - your discipline in parentheses, and
 - an asterisk if you would be willing to discuss it
i.e., "**mesohaline (marine science)***"
3. Share the word again, but this time, briefly define it for a Grad Thesis SLAM audience.





Activity: *Communicating Research Terms*

REFLECTION & DISCUSSION

Let's discuss how that went, and specifically these two questions:

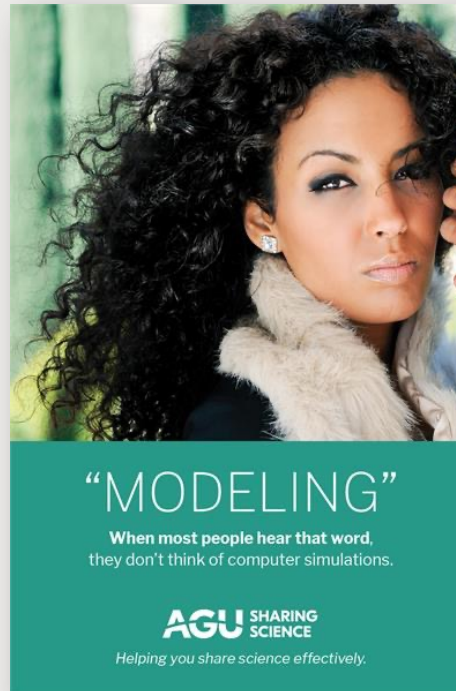
- Does the definition capture the *most important* aspect that this audience needs to understand?
- Did you see a term in the chat that you use within your discipline that someone defined differently than you would?

Communicating Research Terms

Choose words that are:

- Common
- Concrete
- Conversational

Remember that “common terms” might have a different meaning to others.



<https://connect.agu.org/sharingscience/>

Your Research Story

Have a start, middle, and end to your talk.

In a 3-minute presentation, it might look like:

Start (*your hook; ~30 - 45 sec.*)

Middle (*inform and engagement; 90 - 120 sec.*)

End (*take away message; ~30 sec.*)



Your Research Story

Have a start, middle, and end to your talk.

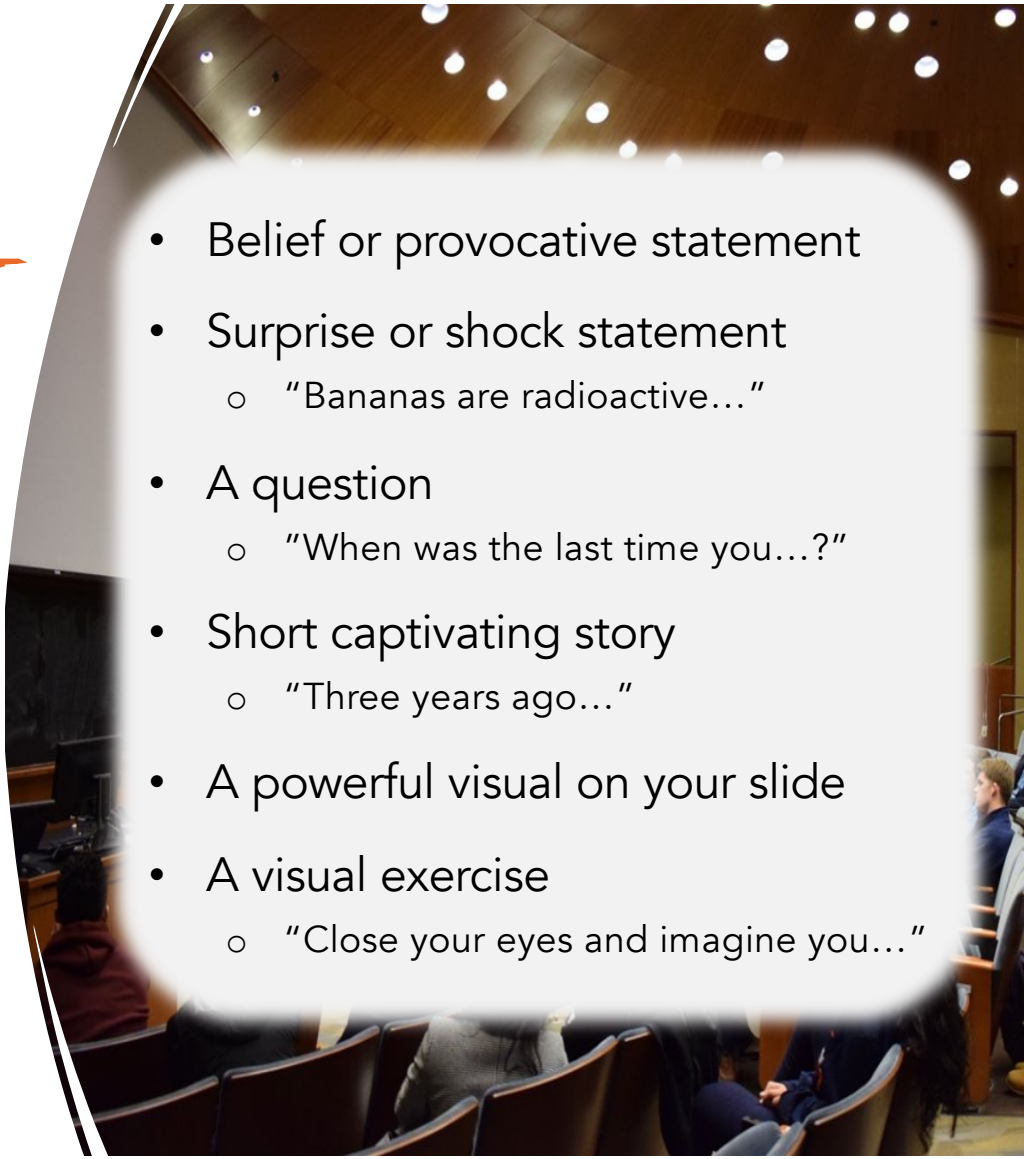
In a 3-minute presentation, it might look like:

Start (*your hook; ~30 - 45 sec.*)

Middle (*inform and engagement; 90 - 120 sec.*)

End (*take away message; ~30 sec.*)

We'll explore 8 tactics you could use next.

- 
- Belief or provocative statement
 - Surprise or shock statement
 - "Bananas are radioactive..."
 - A question
 - "When was the last time you...?"
 - Short captivating story
 - "Three years ago..."
 - A powerful visual on your slide
 - A visual exercise
 - "Close your eyes and imagine you..."

Your Research Story

Have a start, middle, and end to your talk.

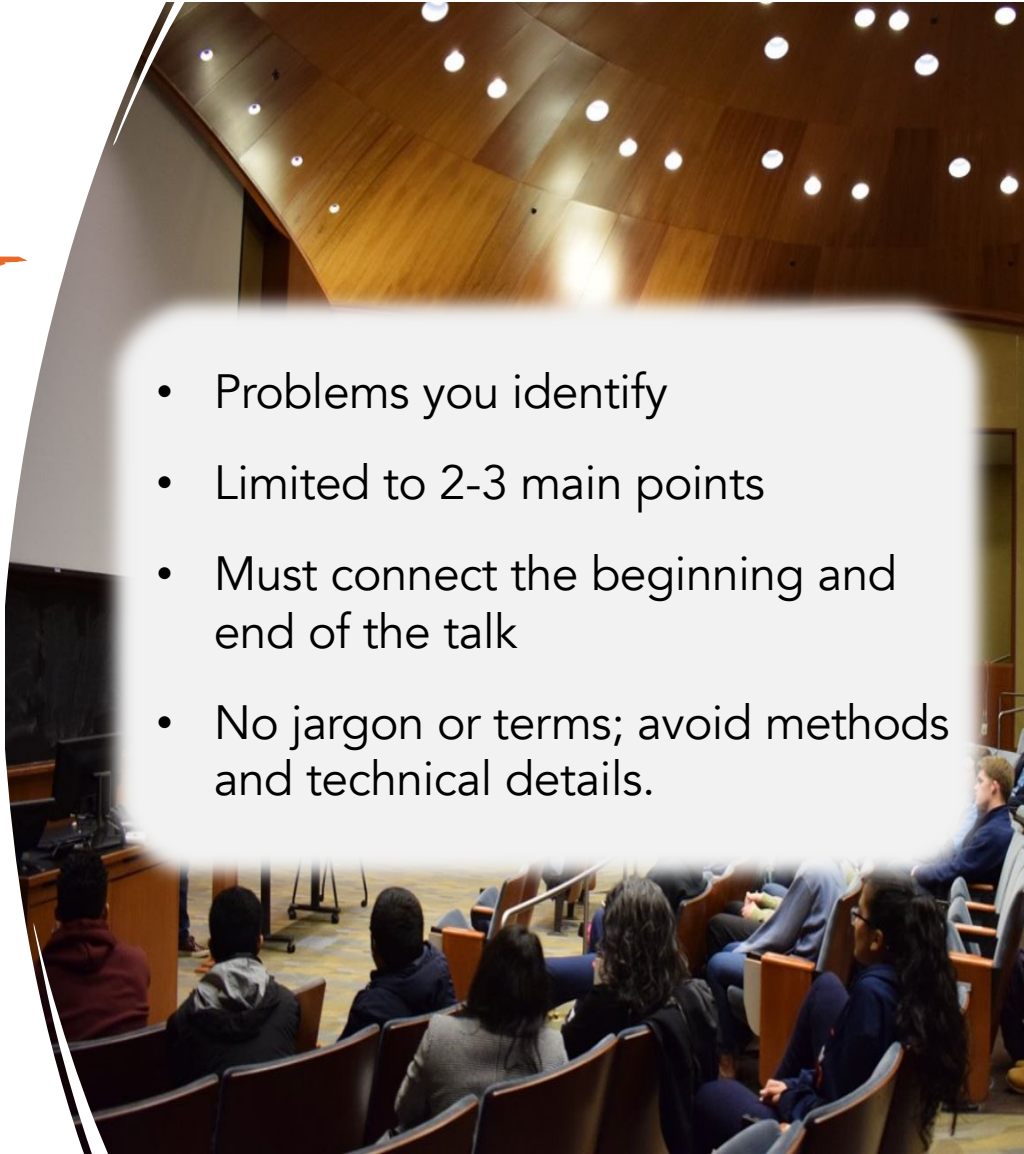
In a 3-minute presentation, it might look like:

Start (*your hook; ~30-45 sec.*)

Middle (*inform and engagement; 90-120 sec.*)

End (*take away message; 30 sec.*)

- Problems you identify
- Limited to 2-3 main points
- Must connect the beginning and end of the talk
- No jargon or terms; avoid methods and technical details.



Your Research Story

Have a start, middle, and end to your talk.

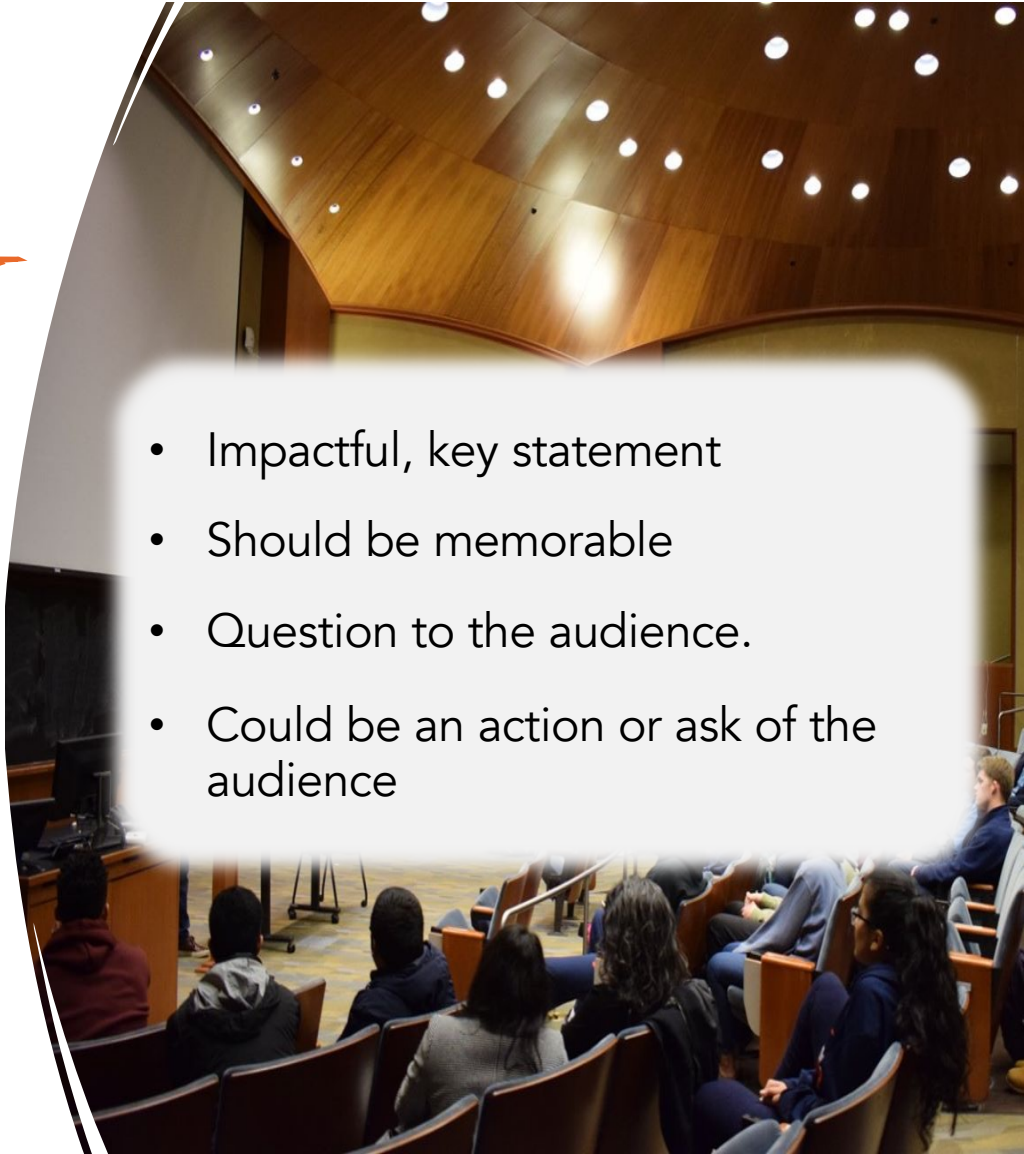
In a 3-minute presentation, it might look like:

Start (*your hook; ~30-45 sec.*)

Middle (*inform and engagement; 90-120 sec.*)

End (*take away message; 30 sec.*)

- Impactful, key statement
- Should be memorable
- Question to the audience.
- Could be an action or ask of the audience



8 Tactics to Start Strong

1. Begin with the ending

THE CONVERSATION

Academic rigor, journalistic flair



The looming stalemate in Ukraine one year after the Russian invasion

Published: February 24, 2023 8:13am EST

A Ukrainian soldier trains near a front line in the Russia-Ukraine war on Feb. 18, 2022. Mustafa Ciftci/Anadolu Agency via Getty Images

Email

Twitter

Facebook

LinkedIn

Print

2

Most military analysts expected Ukraine to fall within days when Russia launched its invasion on Feb. 24, 2022.

Yet one year into the war, Ukrainians have put up a fight and demonstrated remarkable resolve against a powerful military. In fact, some of those military analysts, including former U.S. Secretary of Defense Mark Esper, have begun to wonder whether the war has reached a stalemate.

In my view, as a career U.S. special forces officer, the war is not yet close to a stalemate.

Author



Liam Collins

Founding Director, Modern War Institute, United States Military Academy West Point

Disclosure statement

Liam Collins does not work for, consult, own shares in or receive funding from any company or organization that would benefit from this article, and has disclosed no relevant affiliations beyond their academic appointment.

8 Tactics to Start Strong

2. Tell a personal story that demonstrates an important relevant point

More on this one later!

THE CONVERSATION
Academic rigor, journalistic flair




My art uses plastic recovered from beaches around the world to understand how our consumer society is transforming the ocean


Published: February 14, 2023 8:26am EST

Pam Longobardi amid a giant heap of fishing gear that she and volunteers from the Hawaii Wildlife Fund collected in 2008. David Rothstein, CC BY-ND

 Email

 Twitter 3

 Facebook 138


 LinkedIn

 Print

I am obsessed with plastic objects. I harvest them from the ocean for the stories they hold and to mitigate their ability to harm. Each object has the potential to be a message from the sea – a poem, a cipher, a metaphor, a warning.


My work collecting and photographing ocean plastic and turning it into art began with an epiphany in 2005, on a far-flung beach at the southern tip of the Big Island of Hawaii. At the edge of a black lava beach pounded by surf, I encountered multitudes upon multitudes of plastic objects that the angry ocean was vomiting onto the rocky shore.

I could see that somehow, impossibly, humans had permeated the ocean with plastic waste. Its alien presence was so enormous that it had reached this most isolated point of land in the immense Pacific Ocean. I felt I was witness to an unspeakable crime against nature, and needed to document it and bring back evidence.

Author
 **Pam Longobardi**
Regents' Professor of Art and Design, Georgia State University

Disclosure statement
Pam Longobardi has received funding from Georgia State University, the Hudgens Prize, the Ionian Center for Art and Culture in Kefalonia, Greece, the Oceanic Society, and the Georgia chapter of the Surfrider Foundation. She is a member of the Plastic Pollution Coalition and the Oceanic Society.

Partners
[View all partners](#)


We believe in the

8 Tactics to Start Strong

3. Use an anecdote, illustration, or analogy to demonstrate the point

This is not a personal story.

THE CONVERSATION
Academic rigor, journalistic flair



It's been a warm day, maybe even a little humid, and the tall clouds in the distance remind you of cauliflower. You hear a sharp crack, like the sound of a batter hitting a home run, or a low rumble reminiscent of a truck driving down the highway. A distant thunderstorm, alive with lightning, is making itself known.

Lightning flashes in thunderstorms at least 60 times per second somewhere around the planet, sometimes even near the North Pole.

Author



Chris Vagasky
Meteorologist, University of Wisconsin-Madison

Disclosure statement

Chris Vagasky previously worked for Vaisala, owner-operator of the National Lightning Detection Network

Partners

8 Tactics to Start Strong

4. Use a quotation to start

But be careful – avoid quotes that have become clichés, or that may appear on listicles.

Anti-Asian violence is a serious problem. But policing isn't the solution.

Why do business groups keep speaking for Asian America?

The Washington Post
Democracy Dies in Darkness



Perspective by Crystal Jing Luo

Crystal Jing Luo is a PhD candidate in history at the University of Virginia, where she is working on a dissertation about Asian American politics and economic globalization.

March 16, 2022 at 6:00 a.m. EDT



In August 2021, Carl Chan, president of the Oakland Chinatown Chamber of Commerce, stood inside Pacific Renaissance Plaza, a retail center at the heart of Chinatown in Oakland, Calif. There, in response to a spate of highly publicized attacks on Asian American people and businesses, Chan addressed Calif. Gov. Gavin Newsom (D): “The situation is dire. ... We want you to bring in the California Highway Patrol.”

8 Tactics to Start Strong

5. Use a rhetorical question

THE CONVERSATION
Academic rigor, journalistic flair



A nagging cough can hang on for weeks or months following a respiratory illness – and there is precious little you can do about it


Published: February 10, 2023 8:52am EST

Relentless coughing after a viral infection can be frustrating and worrisome, but in most cases, coughs resolve over time. The Good Brigade/DigitalVision via Getty Images

 Email

 Twitter


 Facebook 85

 LinkedIn

 Print

When was the last time you walked into a public space and didn't hear someone coughing? After three years of flinching at the sound, it can be disarming to hear so many people coughing – and embarrassing if it's you.

But take heart in knowing that you're not alone. A long-lasting cough following illness from an upper respiratory infection is surprisingly common. And unfortunately, with the rise in

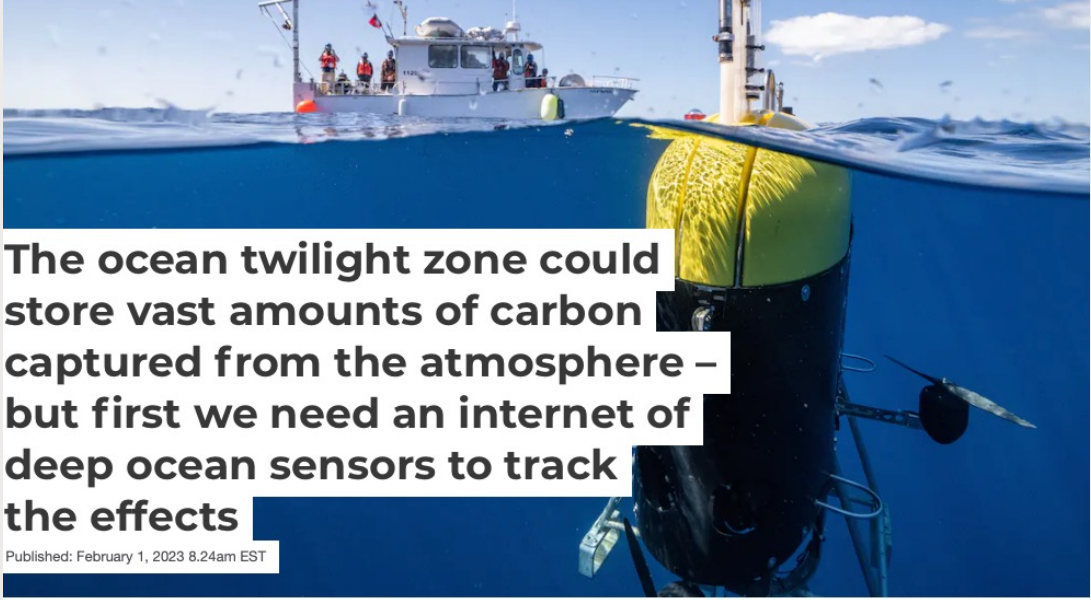
Author
 **Kyle B. Enfield**
Associate Professor of Medicine,
University of Virginia

Disclosure statement
Kyle B. Enfield receives funding from the National Heart and Lung Institute, Society of Critical Care Medicine - CureID, and the

8 Tactics to Start Strong

6. Project into the future


THE CONVERSATION
Academic rigor, journalistic flair




The ocean twilight zone could store vast amounts of carbon captured from the atmosphere – but first we need an internet of deep ocean sensors to track the effects


Published: February 1, 2023 8.24am EST


A large robot, loaded with sensors and cameras, designed to explore the ocean twilight zone. Marine Imaging Technologies, LLC © Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution

 Email

 Twitter 4


 Facebook 79

 LinkedIn

 Print

Deep below the ocean surface, the light fades into a twilight zone where whales and fish migrate and dead algae and zooplankton rain down from above. This is the heart of the ocean's carbon pump, part of the natural ocean processes that capture about a third of all human-produced carbon dioxide and sink it into the deep sea, where it remains for hundreds of years.

There may be ways to enhance these processes so the ocean pulls more carbon out of the atmosphere to help slow climate change. Yet little is known about the consequences.

Author
 **Peter de Menocal**
Director, Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution

Disclosure statement
Peter de Menocal is the president and director of Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution.

Partners
[View all partners](#)

8 Tactics to Start Strong

7. Look into the past

THE CONVERSATION

Academic rigor, journalistic flair



In medieval Europe, views of women could often be summed up in two words: sinner or saint.

As a historian of the Middle Ages, I teach a course entitled Between Eve and Mary: the two biblical figures who sum up this binary view of half of humanity. In the Bible's telling, Eve got humans expelled from the Garden of Eden, unable to resist biting into the forbidden fruit. Mary, meanwhile, conceived the

Author



Joelle Rollo-Koster
Professor of Medieval History,
University of Rhode Island

Disclosure statement

Joelle Rollo-Koster does not work for, consult, own shares in or receive funding from any company or organization that would benefit

8 Tactics to Start Strong

7.5 Combine Past & Future

8. Incorporate humor

THE CONVERSATION

Academic rigor, journalistic flair



Music painted on the wall of a Venetian orphanage will be heard again nearly 250 years later

Published: November 14, 2023 8:26am EST

The music room of the Ospedaletto is known for its remarkable acoustics. Marica S. Tacconi, CC BY-SA

Email

X (Twitter)

Facebook 443

LinkedIn

Print

Imagine Lady Gaga or Elton John teaching at an orphanage or homeless shelter, offering daily music lessons.

That's what took place at Venice's four Ospedali Grandi, which were charitable institutions that took in the needy – including orphaned and founding girls – from the 16th century to the turn of the 19th century. Remarkably, all four Ospedali hired some of

Author



Marica S. Tacconi
Distinguished Professor of
Musicology and Art History, Penn
State

Disclosure statement

This project received funding from the Gladys

Other Storytelling Techniques

- Feature a character your audience can empathize with or someone who faces a dilemma your audience can relate to.
- This could be you or someone else.
- Additionally, think about *place*. Where is the work happening?



Other Storytelling Techniques

Build tension whether through:

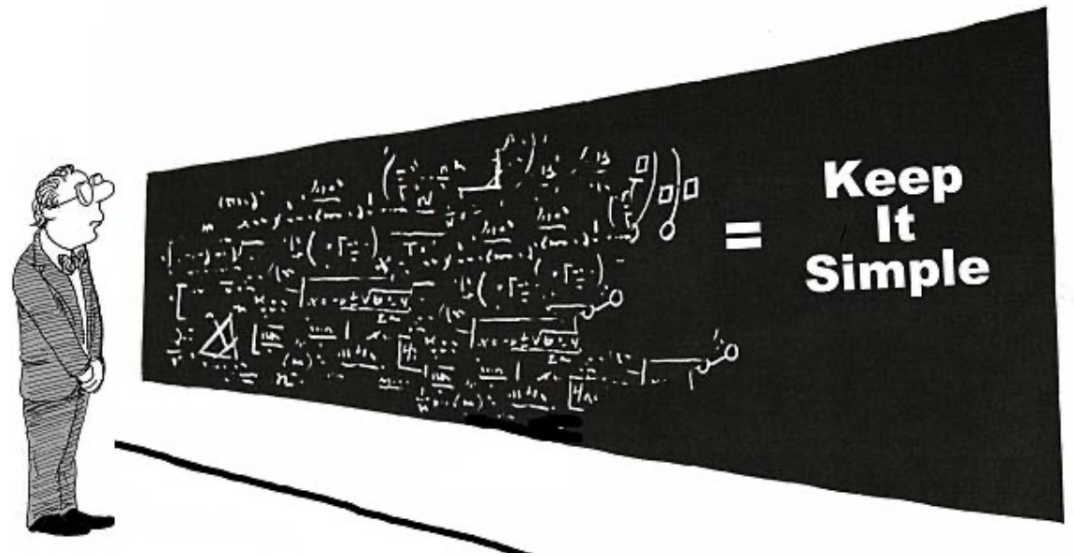
- curiosity,
- intrigue, or
- *actual* danger



Other Storytelling Techniques

Offer the right level of detail.

- Too little and the story is not vivid.
- Too much and it gets bogged down, or in this case you run out of time.



Other Storytelling Techniques

End with a satisfying resolution, whether it's:

- Funny
- Moving
- Revealing
- Empowering



Give Your Story a Purpose

Don't just tell a story for its own sake. Give the audience something they can walk away with:

- Insights
- Actionable information
- Perspective
- Context
- Hope



And make your story TRUE

Questions to Help You Find Your Story...

- What inspired you to do this research?
- What problems or opportunities can your research address?
- What's the gap between what's known and what you hope to learn?
- What eventful things (discoveries!) have happened in your work so far?
- Why would a 90-year-old, curious person care about your work?
- How could your research (even if it is basic) potentially change the world?
- What are the most unexpected/interesting things you discovered/learned during your research?
- What makes your research interesting to your friends?



UNIVERSITY
of VIRGINIA

PhD**Plus**

Examples

Anecdote/Story:

- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5_f_sPlw-dA

Rhetorical Question:

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=klA1VVaDY5w>

Projecting into the Future:


- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SFEzDjDjYp8>



Let's Get Started



What we asked you to think about last time:

- Why should your audience care about your graduate work?
 - Take a satellite view of your research, how does it connect to others, relate to current events, pop culture, etc.
 - What is the Big Picture problem, issue, or unknown aspect you are addressing?
 - What is something about your research that is not obvious to someone outside your discipline?
- 



Take ~2 minutes to think of one or two stories related to your research.

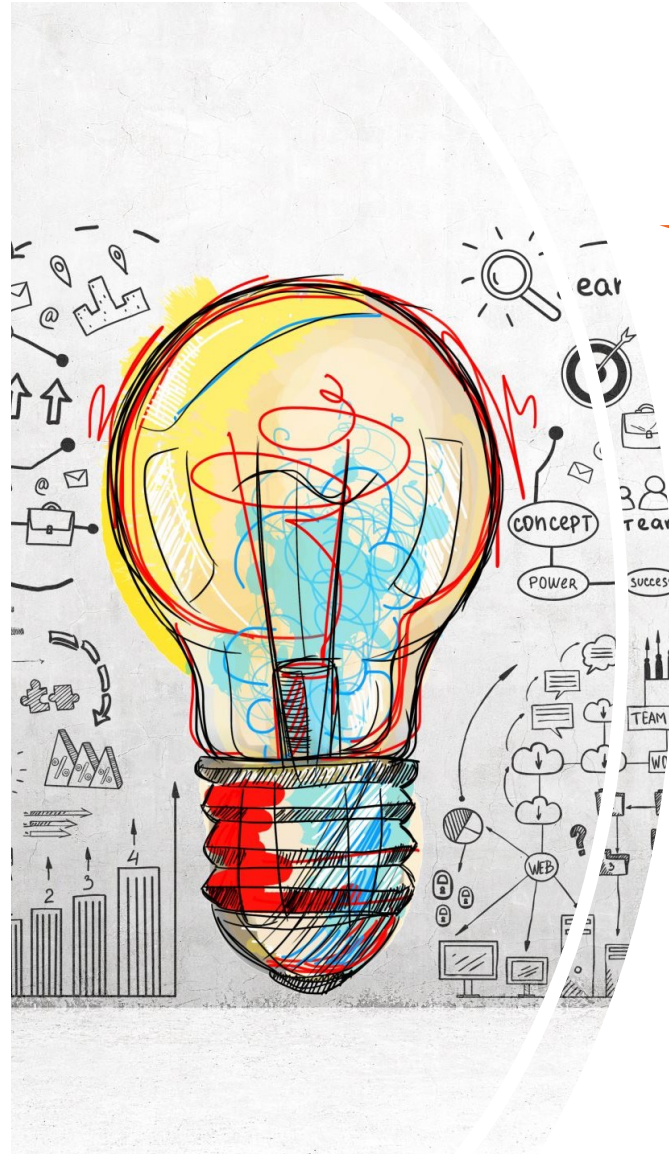
1. Think about:
 - What led you to this topic?
 - What inspires and motivates you?
 - What does your typical day doing research look like?
2. Next, we will put you in breakout rooms.
 - Introduce yourselves and share your story one at a time (~3-4 minutes each, including feedback).
 - Give each other constructive feedback.
3. After ~12 minutes, we'll bring everyone back to debrief.

Activity: *What are your stories?*

REFLECTION & DISCUSSION

Let's discuss how your conversation went, and specifically these two questions:

- Is there anything you would add (visual, prop, etc.) to help tell that story if you did it again?
- What does the story you shared accomplish in communicating your research (if anything)?



Before Next Session

- Brainstorm **story options** and other engaging **aspects** of your research (*your hook*), and test them with family or friends.
- Reflect on your **takeaway message**. What do you want the audience to walk away with?
- Refine your **outline**, applying the story structure elements we discussed and practiced today.
- Start **drafting your slide**—bring your rough slide and ideas to share during Prep Series Session 3.





What questions do you have?



Registration Link



Contact us!



Sam Lake, Ph.D.
sjlake@virginia.edu



Kelly Oman, Ph.D.
dkk8cp@virginia.edu