



A year ago, a non-academic friend listened to a talk I gave. I thought it went great. My friend disagreed.

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Nicholas Coles, PhD [@coles_nicholas](#) :

A year ago, a non-academic friend listened to a talk I gave. I thought it went great. My friend disagreed.

She said that academics are experts at making interesting stuff boring—and that we should all take a speech class.

So I did. And here are 6 most useful things I learned.



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1. Practice speaking in your natural voice.

The moment academics step in front of an audience, they often put on a “speaker voice”.

I spent 8 weeks practicing my natural voice. Pauses, rhythms, speed, emphasis, and loudness. It was fun and taught me to speak more dynamically.



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2. Break up your talk.

Why is it that we say no to a 3-hour movie but yes to binging six 30-minute episodes? Because episodes break things up

I now think of a 60-minute talk as 4-6 episodes. Each should give people a brief break (e.g., for questions) and leave them wanting more



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3. Don't cram in material.

If you cram in too much, you'll exhaust your audience.

We have to remind ourselves that most people don't care as much about the details as we do. Even if they do, hopefully they'll just ask. Awesome! Now you have a great Q&A session.



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4. Research the setting.

Ask what the room looks like. Visualize the room when you practice. When you show up, it will feel familiar; you'll know how loud to talk and how to work the space.

Ask about your audience too, and consider tailoring your materials to increase relevance



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5. End early.

People complain when talks go long—not short.

If you plan to end early, you'll be less likely to go long. Ending early also makes it feel like time flew by. It also gives more time for Q&A and discussion (which should be lively if your talk went well).



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6. Prepare two conclusion statements.

Academic talks often end with a Q&A. But this can mean that the last thing you audience hears is a subpar question or an awkward “No more questions?”

You can ensure that things end on a high note if you prep a post-Q&A conclusion.



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These six pieces of advice are opinionated. And there's lots of nuance. But these tips have worked well for me.

In the last talk I gave, several audience members emailed me and said it was one of the best talks they've recently attended. I NEVER got that kind of feedback before.



Nicholas Coles, PhD [@coles_nicholas](#) :

Academics study interesting and important things. But we often lack training in how to effectively engage an audience.

I hope my advice helps. Because if we want to maximize the impact of our scientific endeavors, we need to keep working on our public speaking skills.