EN 663.645.01: Professional Development Module:  
Improving Presentation Skills for Scientists & Engineers  

Semester: 9/3-10/15  
Wednesdays, 4:30-7 p.m.  
Gilman 119  

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“According to most studies, peoples’ number one fear is public speaking. Number two is death. Death is number two. Does that sound right? This means to the average person, if you go to a funeral, you’re better off in the casket than doing the eulogy.”  
—Jerry Seinfeld  

_You do not really understand something unless you can explain it to your grandmother._  
*Albert Einstein*  

**Course Philosophy**  

As Jerry Seinfeld notes, the fear of public speaking can be so intense that many of us would prefer dying rather than giving a speech. Even veteran speakers admit to feeling butterflies, nausea, or panic before some of their most important speaking engagements. While very few people manage to rid themselves completely of their fear, many people do learn how to channel that fear effectively and use it to become compelling, persuasive speakers.  

This course is designed to help you push through any anxieties you may have about public speaking by immersing you in a supportive, practice-intensive environment. It is also designed to help you become a more effective communicator by guiding you to 1)
refine the core “story” or “message” of your research, 2) improve the overall clarity of
your visuals, and 3) create a “stickier” takeaway for your work that makes it easier for
readers, listeners, audience members, or other key stakeholders to remember your work
and do something in response to it. During most class sessions, you will present a speech
as well as provide feedback on other students’ speeches. In short, this is a course where
you will learn by doing—not by listening to a lecture.

As a scientist or engineer, good communication skills can make you or break
you. You may be smart enough to be the next Nobel Laureate or MacArthur
genius, but if you can’t communicate the “big picture” of your results skillfully, you
will have trouble securing grants, getting published, gaining employment, and being
promoted. Whether you realize it or not, you need to be as good a communicator as
you are a scientist. This class will help you manifest that ability.

Required Texts and Materials

*Presentation Zen, 2nd Edition*
Garr Reynolds

*The Art of Explanation: Making Your Ideas, Products, and Services Easier to
Understand*
Lee LeFever
ISBN: 978-1-118-37458-0

*Both of these books can be read for free on the MSE Library’s website.

Course Expectations

Grading: This course is taught pass/fail only. To pass the class, you must attend at least
six of the seven sessions and present all three speeches on the assigned days. If you
know you will have to miss more than one class, I would recommend taking this module
during a different semester. No audits are allowed.

Attendance and Participation: Because this is a practice-intensive environment where
most of our work will happen during the actual class period, it is imperative that you
come to class well prepared and on time. This success of this class depends heavily upon
your active and vocal participation throughout the entire course. This means you need to
be prepared to give your speech, to stay engaged during your colleagues’ presentations,
and to offer helpful but kind feedback after each presenter. You should also plan on
setting aside time during the rest of the week to work on your speeches. If you want to
see any kind of improvement in your speaking ability, it is critical that you have ample
preparation and practice time.
Slides: The podia around JHU are not particularly receptive to using multiple laptops and/or USB drives in a short period of time. In the past, we have had problems with crashing technology. To alleviate this problem, my course assistant has set up a Dropbox folder that we will use to download your slides to the computer prior to each class. In order to make sure we have plenty of time to deliver speeches during our class period and to make sure that you really know your slide order well, please upload your slides the day prior to class.

Ethics: The strength of the university depends on academic and personal integrity. In this course, you must be honest and truthful. Ethical violations include cheating on exams, plagiarism, reuse of assignments, improper use of the Internet and electronic devices, unauthorized collaboration, alteration of graded assignments, forgery and falsification, lying, facilitating academic dishonesty, and unfair competition.

In addition, the specific ethics guidelines for this course are:
(1) Do not use downloaded stock footage or other copyrighted images illegally.
(2) Please include a reference page at the end of each slide presentation after your concluding slide.
(3) Multiple violations will result in an “F” in the course. I have a zero tolerance policy toward plagiarism and ethical violations. If you are caught plagiarizing or cheating, you will immediately receive an automatic “F” as your final grade in the course. The incident will also be reported to the Ethics Board, and you may be expelled from the university.

Report any violations you witness to the instructor.

You can find more information about university misconduct policies on the web at these sites:
- For undergraduates: http://e-catalog.jhu.edu/undergrad-students/student-life-policies/
- For graduate students: http://e-catalog.jhu.edu/grad-students/graduate-specific-policies/

Email and Listserv
Email is a great way to contact me, and I am happy to answer any course-related questions you might have. My personal email address is julie.reiser@gmail.com. I can usually respond to most emails within 24-48 hours. You can also email the course assistant for help as well. I use a Google listserv for course announcements: jhugradmodules@googlegroups.com. You are required to use the listserv for the seven-week period of our course. Our course assistant will add you directly to the listserv and/or email you instructions for joining. Please watch your inbox after the first day of class. Also, please remember that the listserv will send an email to everyone in the group—including me.
Course Components

Self-introduction Speech, 3 minutes
For this assignment, you will be asked to prepare an impromptu, short speech to introduce yourself and your work to your fellow students.

Elevator Pitch & Cocktail Party Speech, 1 minute
For this assignment, you will be asked to deliver an “elevator pitch” about your work. An elevator pitch comes from the world of entrepreneurship where an inventor fortuitously finds herself in an elevator with a famous venture capitalist she has been trying to meet. The inventor uses the short ride in the elevator to deliver a very natural, very powerful, and very compact message to try to persuade the VC to invest in her invention. In our class, we modify the elevator pitch to make it fit a cocktail party environment that you might encounter at a conference or other university event. We will have food and libations to help simulate the atmosphere.

Baseline Speech, 5 minutes
For this assignment, please craft a five-minute speech that introduces people to your current research. Try to develop a “sticky” message about your work and articulate it in “real world” language. Focus your presentation on just the critical concepts that are necessary to articulate it. Center on the novelty of your approach but also link your research to real-world applications, ethics, and questions.

Slides Workshop
During this class session, we will conduct detailed, in-depth reviews of each participant’s slides in order to help him/her remodel them for an audience of non-experts and other scientists. Your slides should follow the design style outlined in *Presentation Zen*. In particular, please re-read chapters 6-7, “Presentation Design: Principles & Techniques” and “Sample Visuals: Images & Text.”

Revised Speech for Non-Experts and Other Scientists, 10 minutes
For this assignment, please revise your initial baseline speech and tailor it toward a disparate audience of non-experts and other scientists. In other words, your speech should appeal to people in your own department and other closely related scientific disciplines as well as other people who know nothing about your field. Please use all the lessons you’ve learned about honing and shaping your message to reach all three of these audiences. Your speech should emphasize the novelty of your approach and relate it to the state of the field as a whole. Your slides should follow the design style outlined in *Presentation Zen*. 
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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Speech Assignment</th>
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| W 9/3 | Course Intro  
Self-introduction Speech                     |                                                                      |
| W 9/10| Networking Reception for Pitches                      | Read *The Art of Explanation* and pitching handouts. Craft a pitch and practice it for next week. |
| W 9/17| No Class                                              | Read *Presentation Zen*.                                             |
| W 9/24| Baseline Speech                                       | Create a presentation based on your original research and craft a deck of slides following the style outlined in *Presentation Zen*. |
| W 10/1| Slides Workshop +  
Individual Conference Week                         | Revise your baseline speech and slides according to the feedback you received from class. Bring your slides to class for an intensive session of peer review.  
Sign up for an individual conference with me. These will be held in 106C Whitehead. |
| W 10/8| Non-Expert Speeches—Day One                          | Remodel your baseline speech and slides according to the feedback you received from your peers. Make sure that your slides follow the style outlined in *Presentation Zen*. |
| W 10/15| Non-Expert Speeches—Day Two                         | Remodel your baseline speech and slides according to the feedback you received from your peers. Make sure that your slides follow the style outlined in *Presentation Zen*. |
| TBD   | Conferences                                           | Please feel free to schedule an additional follow-up conference with me at any time during the semester or later. We will watch your footage together, review your slides, and create a plan for continued improvement of your speaking ability. |