The Common Touch in Research
Or, How to Be Smart about Talking Down to People
Recently Published Dissertations at the University of Utah

“Working Towards an Optimized Therapy for Abnormal Endometrial Proliferation: Treatment Approaches and Disease Modeling”

“Seismic Evaluation of Grouted Splice Sleeve Connections for Bridge Piers in Accelerated Bridge Construction”

“Development of Materials for Ultraviolet Plasmonics”

“Intensity-Only Imaging with Waves, Restarted Inverse Born Series, and Analysis of Coarsening in Polycrystalline Materials”

“Numerical and Experimental Techniques for Enhanced Power Generation in a Nanoscale-Gap Thermophotovoltaic Device”
Rules of Engagement

Assess Your Audience
Keep it Simple
Use Limited Metaphors
Show the Impact
“Good Evening. I would like to thank the Commissioner of Energy for the opportunity I have to address you today regarding the development of extra-solar gamma radiation.”

“Yo, wassup?”
Assess Your Audience

Do’s
Determine the Level of Expertise of the Audience
Determine the Basic Desires of the Audience
Be Clear what you want the Audience to Do
Be Confident

Don’ts
Overcorrect Downwards
Ask for Forgiveness
Ingestion of hypochlorite solutions causes vomiting and corrosive injury to the gastrointestinal tract.”

“Drinking bleach will eat your stomach from the inside out.”
Keep it Simple

Don’ts
- Jargon
- Discipline-Specific Appropriation of Other Words
- Define More than Two-Three Words
- Explain the Subtleties

Do’s
- Everyday Language
- Accessible Register
Keep it Simple

Don’ts
Jargon
Discipline-Specific Appropriation of Other Words
Define More than Two-Three Words
Explain the Subtleties

Do’s
Everyday Language
Accessible Register
Basic Words
“Learning is like gardening. The teachers are the tools, like the rake and trowel, that you use to prepare the soil. The knowledge you bring in your own brain is like the seed that is planted. Study is like being watered by rain or a watering pot. Sometimes there are weeds that have to be pulled. Schools will sell you as the finished product of learning to the marketplace of ideas.”

“All religions, arts and sciences are branches of the same tree.”
Use Limited Metaphors

Do’s
Choose an Everyday Occurrence/Example
Have 1-3 Points of “Contact” with the Metaphor
Keep it Brief

Don’ts
Explain Every Possible Connection Point
Use More than Two Metaphors (Ideally, 1)
Let the Metaphor Distract from the Main Point of the Research
SCIENTISTS DISCOVER CHEMICAL CONDITIONS FOR HEALTHY REPRODUCTIVE SHUT-DOWN IN POST-MIOTIC PLATELETS WHICH, WITH FURTHER STUDY, MAY HELP EXPLAIN FAULTY SHUT-OFF IN CANCEROUS CELLS
Show the Impact

**Do’s**
- Keep it Simple
- Answer the Audience’s Question: “Why Should I Care?”
- Tailor Your Answer to Your Audience
- Remember Emotions
- Be Specific

**Don’ts**
- Focus on Your Own Goals
- Revert Back to Jargon/Discipline-Specific Language
- Think that the Impact is Self-Evident
Upcoming Graduate School Activities

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Diversity Office Taco Tuesdays

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