

# Communicating your message to engage a lay audience

Dr. Linda Mason

Interim Dean, Graduate School

Entomologist



# What makes an engaging presentation?



<http://www.ioha2015.org/presenters/>



<http://www.ihatepresentations.com/your-presentation-audience/>

What is the most important  
qualification for any job?  
The key ingredient of a strong team?  
The skill that most employers say is  
indispensable to them?

Every conversation is an improvisation  
– which makes us all improvisors.

Improv is about co-creating mutually  
beneficial conversations

Improv is all about *re-acting*

What has changed most is not their verbiage, but their demeanor and attitude.

# Listening

Speak with your audience rather than  
at them.....

## Presentations are 2-way

One may be speaking but everyone is involved in sharing a common idea

The audience contributes to the success of a speaker when it collectively shows interest or enthusiasm, or can, make the speakers job more difficult.

The human mind is a story  
processor, not a logic processor.

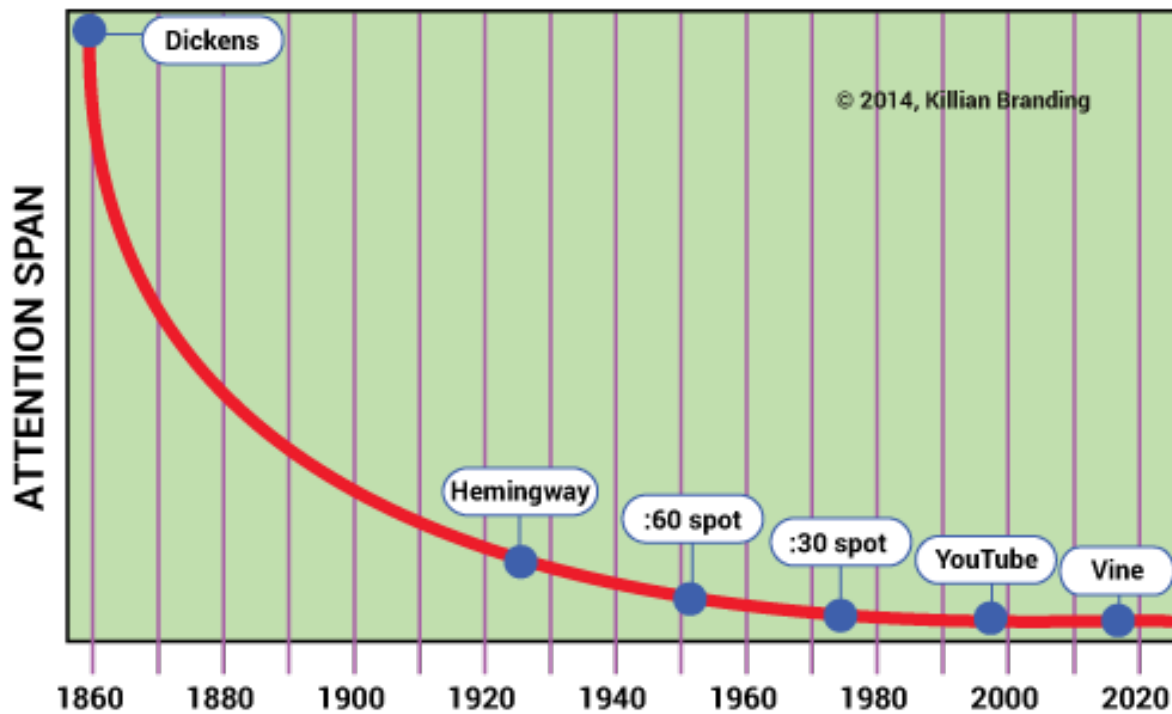
John Haidt, *The Righteous Mind*

John Montagu  
4<sup>th</sup> Earl of Sandwich  
1748





# Attention spans are decreasing



9 seconds

2000	12 seconds
2015	8.25 seconds

National Centre for Biotechnology Information

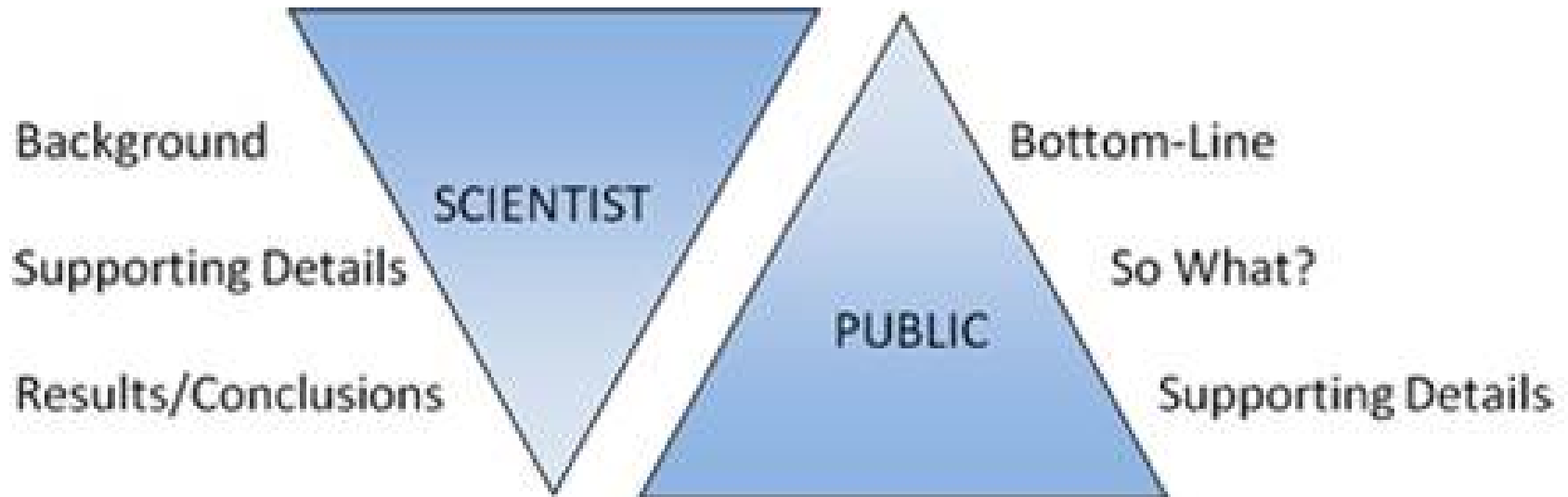
Camiryan.com

## Stories and Metaphors

Too many facts or talking points	language processing part of our brain gets activated (Broca's or Wernicke's area)
Story format	language processing <b>PLUS</b> other areas as well; including those parts that we would use if we were <i>actually experiencing the events of the story first-hand</i>

(Gonzales et al 2006)

# Develop Your Message in 3 Points



<http://communicatingscience.aaas.org/comm101/3point.shtml>

# What is your “hook” ?



## Why standardize?

The city of  
Baltimore  
burnt to the  
ground in  
1904



Of about 3 million youth that are injured every year playing sports or participating in recreational activities, only 25% are treated in hospital emergency rooms.



## Drey Mingo, Basketball, Meningitis, Hear Aids



**A cockroach can  
carry more than 40  
different  
pathogens that  
could spread to  
humans**





Have you ever stayed up all night to study for an exam, only to sleep through your exam the next morning?



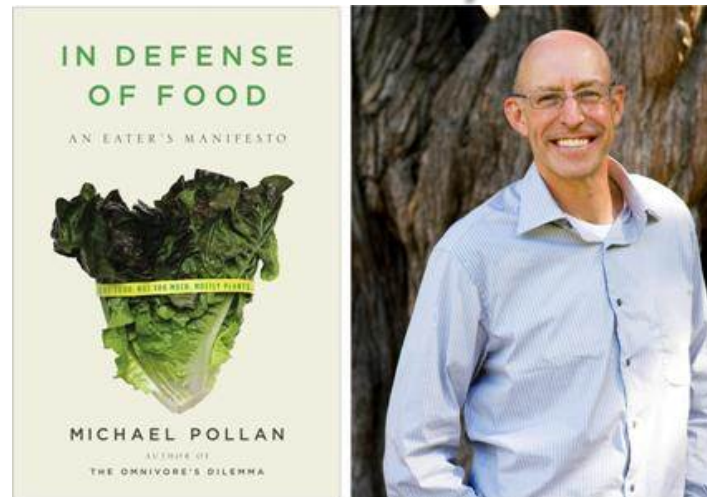
## Be Provocative....

“You will live 7.5 minutes longer than you would have otherwise, just because you watched this talk.”

Jane McGonigal – June  
2012 Ted talk

## Michael Pollan's 7-word summary

- Eat food
- Not too much
- Mostly plants



# “Simplifying” Does Not Mean “Dumbing Down”

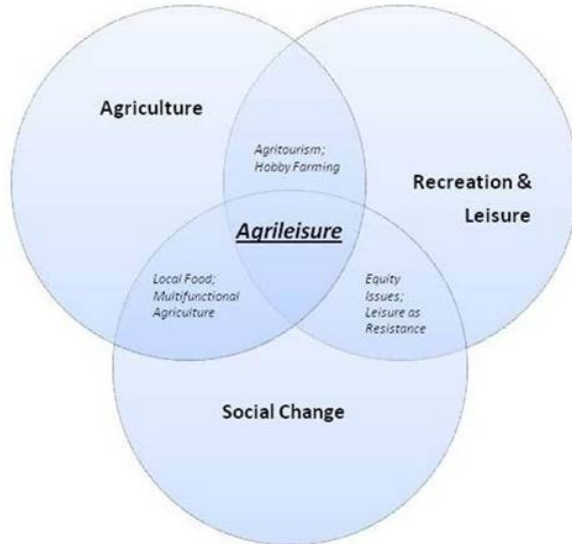
- You can focus on the meaning, rather the process
- You can tell listeners: “This is simplified. It gets more complicated. I can tell you about that if you want to.”

Do not be afraid to simplify.

“Mortality” becomes “death.”

“Utilize” is the same as “use”

Develop more than one speech.



Paint a picture of your work

Spend some time coming up with an analogy that fits your particular scientific problem



Is your biosynthesis pathway like an assembly line?

# Establish your assertion in 8-14 words

Use “explanatory images”—not decorative or descriptive images—to support each assertion



**BEFORE**

Meaningless header, a place holder

## METHODS

### • Study Site

- Ny-Ålesund in Norway
- Latitude - 79° N
- Longitude - 12° E



### • Mercury measurement

- 12 measurement devices set up around study site
- Used apparatus to simultaneously measure particulate and gaseous mercury levels from air and from the surface of snow

> 40 words

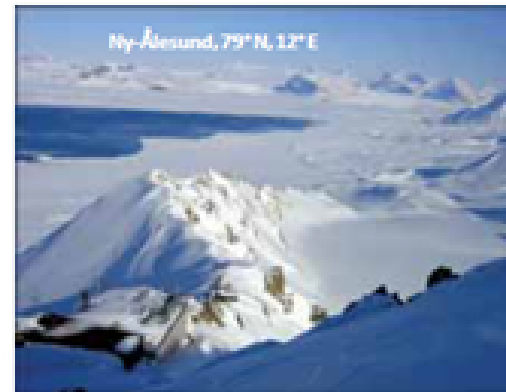
Photo used as decoration

**AFTER**

< 25 words

Single, clear assertion

At Ny-Ålesund, we simultaneously measured mercury in both the air and the surface snow



Particulate Mercury



Gaseous Mercury

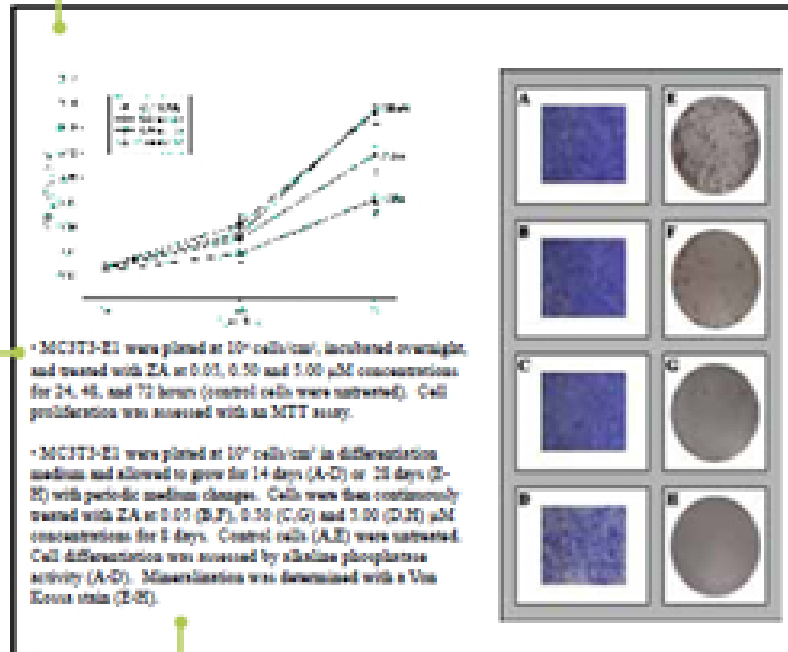


Photos explain pertinent information



**BEFORE**

Graph details too small to read

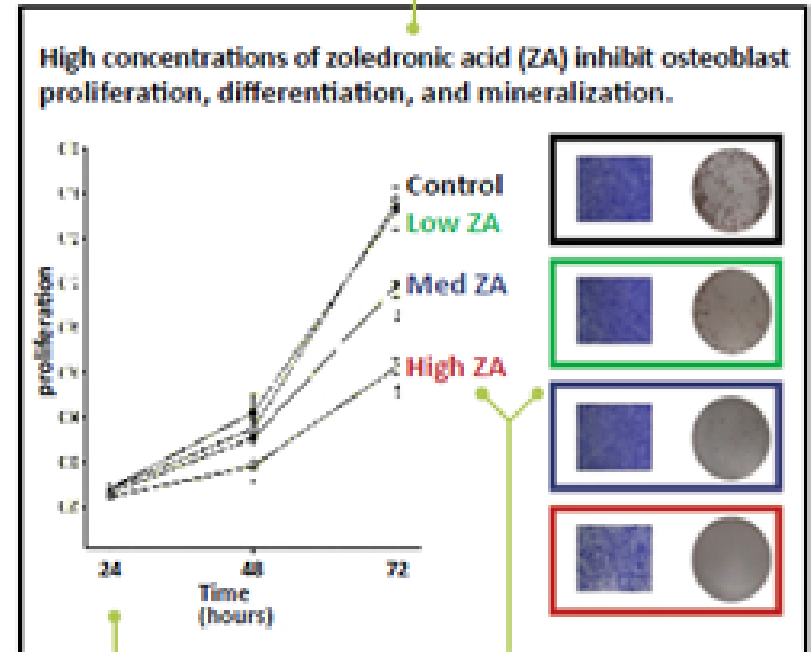


Text pulled directly from figure legend

Bullet points too detailed and make hard-to-connect reference to figure

**AFTER**

Unified concept simplified into assertion statement



Graph and images color-coded for clear referencing

Graph much larger and easier to read

# Non-verbal expression of power and dominance

Ted Talk - Amy Cuddy: Your body language shapes who you are

Delivery counts  
Pitch  
Volume  
Pace  
Maintain eye contact

# **Be passionate – believe in your subject and inspire others.**

As a result, your energy becomes persuasive and ultimately contagious. Look and sound passionate. your listeners will be