



Book Review

Presenting science concisely

By B. Kirchoff and J. Wagner

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Professor Bruce Kirchoff is an academic at the University of North Carolina, Greensboro. He attained his Ph.D., from Duke University and has published numerous papers on plant morphology, development and systematics. He studied scientific communication at the Alan Alda Center. Jon Wagner obtained a Master's of Science in Illustration at the University of California, Santa Cruz. Both the author and illustrator have enough skills, experience and expertise to present this book.

As the book's title states, it aims to show you how to present your science effectively and concisely. It explains how to construct and present your research both professionally and believably. It does this for most types of presentations that researchers are likely to experience, including: elevator pitches (a brief, persuasive talk that sparks interest), lightning talks (typically 5–10 min), 3-minute thesis presentations, conference and longer presentations. Poster design and presentations skills are also explored. The book is set out in nine chapters plus contents, introduction and index. The first two chapters are to make you think about your research as a narrative and to provide a background in explaining science. The next five chapters are divided by presentation style and thus are subject based, entitled as: Presenting in Three Minutes, Elevator Pitches, Application to Longer Forms, Poster Presentations, Analysis of Real Posters. The last two chapters are more general in developing an audience focus and successful communication skills. They are entitled: Audience – It Is All About the Audience, and Presentation Skills. Having the five specific presentation chapters adds to the quick reference functionality of the book, although at only 134 pages in all, it is an easy read cover to cover. By number of pages per subject the book is weighted more on the five central specific presentation chapters (75 pages) than the general backgrounding and general skills chapters (46 pages). True to its title the book is concise, but that is not to be considered a criticism.

This book is pitched towards scientific researchers who will present their findings at various stages of their careers. This includes senior academics, mid-term, early career, and post graduate researchers. I include my senior colleagues in the target audience because so many of them have put me to sleep over the years, even when I came to their talks by choice. Given the amount of snoring at the back of seminars this book will be needed by all, with everyone to benefit.

I see the greatest strength of this book as being that it is concise and therefore it may be read by those that need to read it quickly, because they are busy with research. It sets out to be a guide to help you prepare clear and credible presentations. From the outset it sets its agenda as one of combining science and storytelling, and throughout it attempts to entwine the scientific process with the narrative structure as a way of organising and presenting talks. It is a great strength of the book that it recognises that scientists are too often far removed from literature and communication, which live in the humanities faculties, and thus they struggle to successfully communicate away from graphs and charts.

Such a book must surely facilitate growth in the various scientific disciplines by way of teaching scientists to improve their communication. Since this information is being communicated by a scientist, I believe the book will be more accessible to scientists. An unexpected though extremely practical strength of this book is the many light-hearted illustrations found throughout; these add colour and contrast emphasising the various messages. They also casualise the conversation and make communication between author and reader more relaxed and enjoyable. The educational benefit is obvious. All levels of scientists/researchers/grad students will benefit from improving their communication skills. The presenter's research will be more broadly distributed by being absorbed into more minds in the audience, because those minds will be more awake and more interested in the

presenter's message. The research that has gone into the book appears both appropriate and adequate for its aims. A short reference section is given at the conclusion of each chapter. No doubt the references supplied are not the usual reading of researchers and, if followed, will provide deeper insights in public speaking and communication.

As in keeping with a book on concise communication the style of writing is engaging, clear and concise; it is detailed appropriately when needed. For example, Chapter 3, Presenting in Three Minutes, specifically looks at the Three Minute Thesis (3MT[®]). Examples in this chapter have been drawn from excellent talks and information available online at The University of Queensland, who are world leaders and copyright holders of this presentation style ([The University of Queensland 2008](#)). It is also a lovely place to work and study.

The supplementary material presented in this book is eye-catching, entirely appropriate and frequent enough. There are some quick response (QR) codes, which act as references by linking you to some Three Minute Theses. The cover is glossy and water resistant. I could wipe my spilt coffee from it without damage.

This is not the first book on communicating science, I reviewed another on writing papers recently ([Fulton 2021](#));

it is however the first I have seen to incorporate the 3MT[®] and delve into presenting science in engaging ways, for example as three act and five act stories. Its foray into presentations designed considering story structure is fresh and extremely useful. I recommend this to all researchers who want to communicate clearly and quickly to their audiences. Should we all get better at presenting our work then I will try to stay awake during more talks.

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Conflicts of interest. The author declares no conflicts of interest.