

10 Tips for a Winning Entomology Conference Presentation

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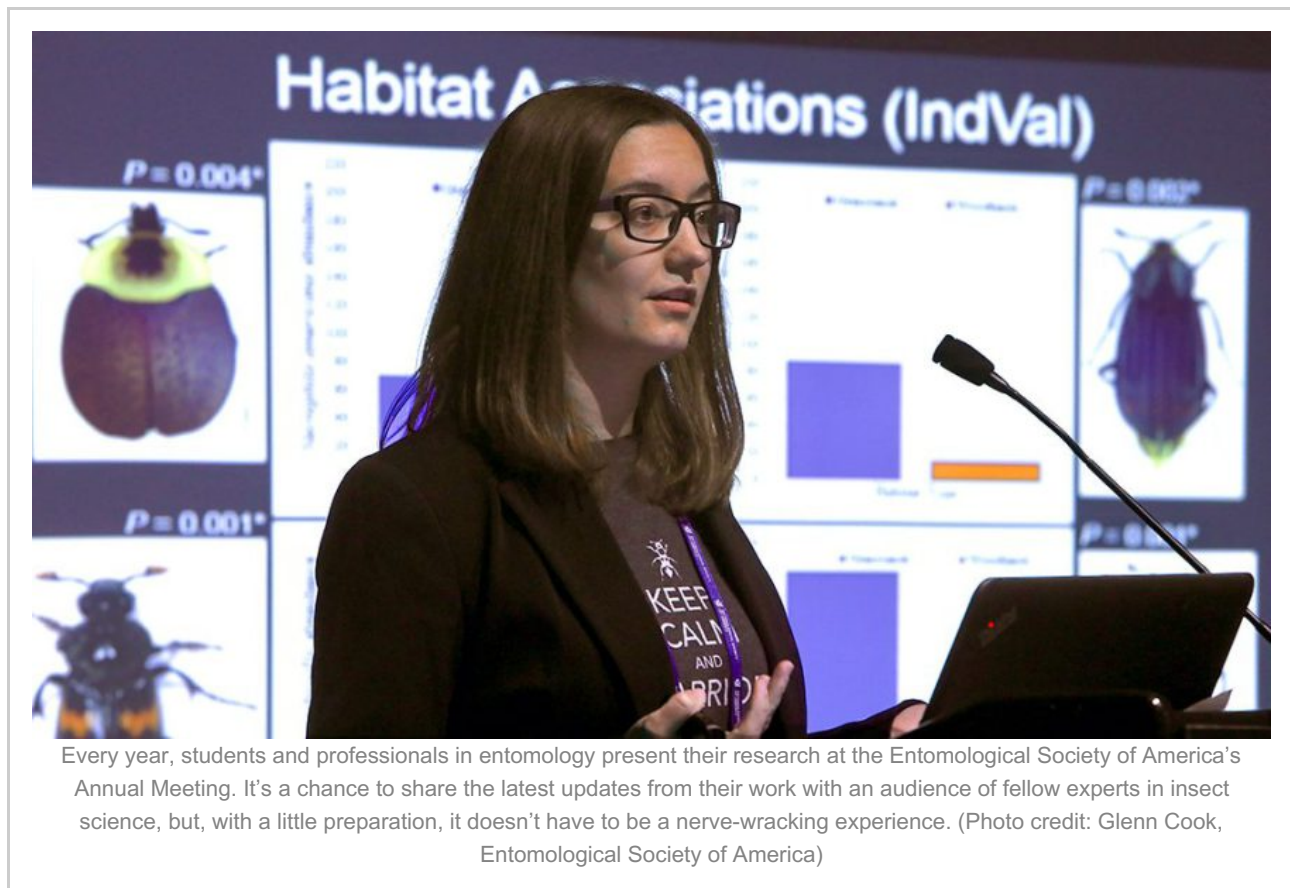
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THE LATEST NEWS ABOUT ENTOMOLOGY, BROUGHT TO YOU BY THE ENTOMOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF AMERICA



Every year, students and professionals in entomology present their research at the Entomological Society of America's Annual Meeting. It's a chance to share the latest updates from their work with an audience of fellow experts in insect science, but, with a little preparation, it doesn't have to be a nerve-wracking experience. (Photo credit: Glenn Cook, Entomological Society of America)

By Lina Bernaola

Editor's Note: This is the first in a series of posts over the coming months contributed by the Entomological Society of America's Student Affairs Committee, with the goal of engaging entomology students and helping them prepare for Entomology 2018, the Joint Annual Meeting of the Entomological Societies of America, Canada, and British Columbia, November 11-14, in Vancouver. Stay tuned for more posts in this series in the future.

Just won an Oscar, or need to run for president of the United States, and can't seem to find the right words? How about feeling the pressure of delivering an Entomological Society of America (ESA) presentation in front of a crowd of experts in insect science? As ESA's Branch Meetings finish, the ESA Annual Meeting begins to loom on the calendar, and we want to give

you the best chance to shine during your next presentation.

If you've ever felt challenged by public speaking or doing well in local or national presentation competitions, then check out the following pointers to gain confidence in your speaking abilities, and go [submit your 10-minute presentation or 3-minute presentation](#) by June 4. And, for students, be sure to enter to compete in the [Student Competition for the President's Prize](#)! You'll even find some hints and guidance from previous winners to support the following tips.



Lina Bernaola

1. **Understand the rubric.** What are the rules and guidelines? If you're a student interested in participating in a competition, ESA offers two options: 10-minute and 3-minute presentations; here, we'll focus on the longer, 10-minute presentation. The good habits developed in this time range will translate well to other professional talks you will give later in your career. Although these tips apply to the 10-minute presentations, some will overlap with the three-minute presentations. [Learn more about student 10-minute presentations.](#)
2. **Build your story.** Judging criteria usually consider scientific content and presentation equally, so you will have to organize your thoughts and deliver your content effectively. Outline your speech before you begin making slides or even writing your first sentence. [Learn more on how to prepare slides for presentations.](#)
3. **Recognize your audience.** While this is generally recognized as a good rule of thumb for all public speaking, it is especially true when discussing scientific topics. Expect most audience members to be familiar with basic statistics, chemistry, biology, and so forth, but consider going into greater detail with any topic that goes beyond an undergraduate course level. Because, remember, you want to keep engaging your audience with your story.
4. **Be concise.** You will often need to be concise with explanations, leaving out parts you may feel are important, to get your main thesis across. No one expects you to condense a dissertation down to 10 minutes, so pick your topic carefully and keep your discussion appropriately narrow. Bear in mind that ESA guidelines suggest eight minutes for presentation and two minutes for questions. So, when you practice, aim for seven minutes; nerves, accidentally talking too long on one slide or topic, faulty equipment, and other unforeseen issues can slow you down or affect your performance. Try to avoid an awkward silence, don't be discouraged, and keep going! Try timing your whole presentation during practice and consider timing individual slides too.
5. **Practice your speech.** Work each slide one at a time—you don't even have to practice them in order! If memorization suits your style of presenting best, then intentionally review your slides out of order. In this way, if you ever stumble and forget the segue to your next topic, then your brain can reboot as soon as you see the next slide.
6. **Phone a friend!** Many people prefer to practice alone and "save it for the stage" when debuting a new research topic. However, if you get comfortable delivering your speech to a friend or two, then you will have broken down one of the first mental barriers of presenting. More importantly, your confidants can give you valuable feedback! Ask them

if you were talking too quickly or taking enough short breaks between important sections; if you used good voice inflection; if the material was presented in a logical, easy-to-follow manner; if your body language was too distracting; and any other details they notice that can help you improve. [Learn more about body language and its effective use.](#)

7. **Don't read your slides.** Use the slide title to make a point and the remainder of the slide to support that position. To avoid reading from your slides, past presentation winner Tolulope Morawo suggests you make eye contact with the audience to engage them.
8. **Visuals are key.** Display tables and charts to prove your points instead of talking about them. Emphasize data with simple, legible figures: use large text and few words, and always include units! Try this exercise the next time you are working on your laptop: View your slides in presentation mode and take five steps back. Can you read everything without squinting your eyes? Remember, lighting conditions may differ dramatically from where you are practicing, or perhaps someone in your audience forgot their glasses. If you are having trouble fitting all the information you want to talk about on one slide with this method, then perhaps you have not sufficiently narrowed down the purpose of the slide yet. Remember, audiences typically learn better through powerful graphs and visuals.
9. **Polish your presentation.** Use high-level mechanisms such as rhetorical questions to intrigue your audience or personal anecdotes to connect with them. Past ESA winning competitor Zoe Getman-Pickering practices "turning [her] presentation into a fairy tale ... so [she has] a clear sense for the story. For instance, 'Once upon a time there was a poor helpless plant who was constantly under attack from big, evil caterpillars.'" Take care with only introducing relevant topics though, and don't spend too much time on them.
10. **Stay hydrated.** Eat well and drink plenty of water. This is a competition, right? Your body and especially your brain require fuel to deliver top-notch performances. Bring a bottle of water to the podium too, in case your throat gets dry or you have a mild coughing fit.

There are tons of more presentation-skills tips online, but practice is the only way to get better. To quote Tolulope Morawo again, "There is no short-cut to giving an award-winning presentation; it's all about practice, practice, practice!" Are you ready to deliver a remarkable presentation and, if you're a student, win the President's Prize this year? Hopefully this advice will help you improve your presentation game for [Entomology 2018](#), the Joint Annual Meeting of the Entomological Societies of America, Canada, and British Columbia, 11-14 November, in Vancouver.

Don't forget the [June 4 deadline for submissions](#) if you want to participate. See you in Vancouver, everyone!

Lina Bernaola is a Ph.D. candidate at Louisiana State University, in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, the current student representative to the ESA Governing Board and a member of both the ESA Student Affairs Committee and the ESA Early Career Professionals Committee.

Twitter: [@linabernaola](#). Email: lbernaola@agcenter.lsu.edu

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