

Know Your Audience

Carnegie Science Center caters specifically to two audiences: school groups and families. Tailor your presentations accordingly.

Start with the basics.

- Assume that your audience needs a brief introductory/refreshers course. If they don't need it, they'll tell you. If you don't start at the beginning and the audience is lost, they probably won't tell you.
- Many science-oriented people who use science everyday forget that there is an underlying level of knowledge shared among their co-workers that may not be shared by the general public.

Language/vocabulary

- Think about how to explain your topic to a five-year old. Complicated topics do not need to be dumbed-down. Rather, use clear, simple vocabulary and analogies to explain the subject.
- Remember that some terms have colloquial and scientific meanings and that the public may not understand the difference.
- Using big and "scientific" words doesn't always help with understanding. Being able to explain a topic clearly does. A rose is a rose is a rose...it is what it is; don't call it something that other people don't understand just because it's your usual scientific jargon.

Examples

- Let's say that you're talking about oxidation. Back up a little bit. Start with breathing. Ask, "Do you know what you are breathing right now? Why do you need to breathe? What do you breathe? What is air made out of?"
- Let's say that you're talking about cabbage juice indicators. Bring a cabbage with you. Ask the kids if they know what it is. While little children may not understand acids and bases they know that things turn color when mixed with other things and they may know what colors the things are turning. Ask older kids if they've ever noticed that salad dressing may change the color of their salad. Bring some vinaigrette. Pour it on the cabbage.

Perceptions of the Audience

Some demonstrations are not particularly dangerous but appear to be so. Visitors may become overly concerned about a demonstration that seems dangerous, but really is not. Explain the science behind the demonstration in terms the visitors will understand and soon they will think "cool" instead of "yikes!"