Tips For A Successful Lab Meeting

Full-length presentations:

Note: *Please upload your lab meeting ppt file the day of your presentation to the box folder 'lab meeting presentations'. Name your presentation as follows: date_name.ppt (e.g. 13Sept2019_Chelsea.ppt or 13Sept13_cds.ppt). Lab meeting presentation files are accessible to current lab members only.*

- Aim for your lab meeting presentation to be a maximum of ~40-45 minutes long, not counting questions. The attention span of your listeners will not last much longer than an hour. You want to leave ample time for discussion throughout, and discussion is going to diminish as people tire.

- Prioritize what you want to present. You may have 3 projects ongoing, but it's not necessary to talk about all of them at each lab meeting. It is better to focus your presentation on one (max 2) projects, or even specific aspects of a project, or a particular paper or grant you are working on. If you do present on all topics, use the presentation as an opportunity to find links between them. And don't forget to give credit to others who have supported you, lab members or colleagues.

- Start your presentation with an explanation of the big picture basis for your project: why is your question important and exciting, and how does it fit in the context of the field and the lab? This shouldn't take more than a couple of slides, and should be geared towards a general scientific audience. *Hint: think about how you might pitch the rationale for your project to a visiting big-shot seminar speaker (who may review your future paper/grant/job application) in 2 minutes or less. This requires practice, so why not practice on us!!*

- Always feel free to insert a few slides of background to bring people up to speed on published findings relevant to your project. Avoid putting actual data in your intro. People generally cannot effectively absorb a ton of primary data, so if you include a lot in your intro they will not pay as close attention to the new data you want input on. Include information that will help set the stage for understanding the field context of what you are about to present. No need to present things that everyone in the lab should already know, unless to remind them that they know it and how it relates to your project.

- Present your most exciting data (or the project you want the most input on) **FIRST**! This might seem counterintuitive, but its important. Your audience is most tuned into the first block of data you show, and the most input/best ideas usually come when minds are fresh. The goal of a lab meeting is to stimulate discussion; if you present too much old data or your less exciting work first, by the time you get to the part you really want people to notice they are likely to be too tired to appreciate it or to come up with an inspired suggestion.

- When you show a gel or a graph or table, go over each lane with a pointer and if important mention what controls you used. Don't just flash up a gel and expect people to absorb it. Address caveats/weaknesses head-on.

- If you are using a technique that is not routine in the lab, show a diagram of how it works.

- Try to be as dynamic as possible! If you are not enthusiastic about your project, it's pretty unlikely anyone else will be.

- If your presentation is not inspiring much discussion or questions, try to evaluate why. Are you going too fast for people to absorb your data? Did you not provide enough context for people to grasp the implications? Are you presenting too many things that people have already seen in previous lab meetings?

Round table presentations:

- These should be ~10-15 minutes, including discussion. It is usually really helpful to plan and practice what you're going to say in advance. Some people are great at giving a brief, clear speech on cue, but for most of us this requires practice. That said, it is a very valuable skill to be able to communicate your point effectively in a short period of time!

- Discussion that goes beyond 15 min should be discussion that includes other people/collaborative projects where lab meeting is the appropriate venue to ensure communication. Share troubleshooting, and share new ideas that are working: also, share your concerns when something isn't working and have some ideas of why things might not be working. We can also use lab meeting as a resource to 'put a pin' in certain topics for future discussion 1-on-1 or as smaller breakout groups, but have an idea ahead of time which topics you think might require breakout discussion.

- Use the ppt slides to show primary data or summaries of those data; showing off your analyses during lab meetings demonstrates you are thinking beyond data generation and are practicing using the analytical tools you will need. It also shows people what tools you are using, so they know who to talk to when they are having troubles with those programs/ platforms.

- Remember, round tables are a way to let everyone know what you're doing so they can offer help or come to you for help. This keeps the lab engaged with one another. Give your presentation to maximize everyone's desire to engage with you.

- Round tables are a way to recognize your progress and be happy, or recognize where you might find lack of progress and positively address the reasons why.

Tips for listeners:

· Be an active participant in the discussion! Often one idea leads to many others, so don't ever hesitate to speak up (even if you just need clarification).

- If you have a question, ask the speaker. DO NOT Google it and assume everyone else knows. If you have the question, chances are someone else does as well.

· Question asking is something that requires (and improves) with practice. The more questions you ask, the easier it becomes to come up with insightful questions in future lab meetings, seminars, etc. Have the goal of coming up with at least one question for each lab meeting (do the same for departmental seminars)—even if you don't always pose the question out loud. You'll find that this trains your mind to be more inquisitive and hone in on important points, and helps you to be more engaged in the presentation.

DO NOT check email or engage with your favorite social media during lab meeting. If you have to bring your computer to take notes, be sure you are just using it to take notes. You distract others (second hand distraction) when you yourself are distracted. If it helps, turn your wireless off. The urge to check email is strong -- if i catch you doing it, i will have to ask you to leave lab meeting.