

A SIMPLE DESIGN FOR A SCIENTIFIC TALK.

One simple and successful model for the design of a talk (or a paper) suggests three main sections: SET, BODY, and CLOSURE. This mirrors the old saw – “*tell them what you’re going to tell them*”, “*tell them*”, “*tell them what you’ve told them*”. Obviously this division is approximate; in any particular talk different parts will receive different emphases, and topics can be moved from one section to the other as appropriate.

SET – This is a general, introductory section that should grab your audience's attention. Lay the groundwork, define terms, set the context. Topics covered might include: why is this topic interesting and worthy of study, what is the purpose of the talk, how is it organized (e.g. outline, handouts), what is the main subject here (e.g. learning, teaching, science), what is the context (e.g. biology, chemistry, education), what does the talk intend to investigate, what influence might it have on other related areas of knowledge, what has been done previously in this general area (e.g. reference to previous work), what is the main method of investigation.

BODY – This is the ‘guts’ of the talk. It details how the research was carried out (including the experimental techniques and the analysis of data), presents the results, and discusses the implications and conclusions. Remember a picture is worth 1000 words – never use tables of numbers (or almost never!).

CLOSURE – Here, you summarize the conclusions and implications, briefly emphasizing the important ones. Relate the talk to the SET section. Discuss the results; include such topics as the relevance to a particular task or field of study, implications for current practice, suggestions for more work or other avenues of interest, etc.

Note: your own opinions and evaluation of the paper, including positive or negative criticism, will be of interest to the class.