University at Buffalo
College of Arts and Sciences

Lightning talk presentation guidelines

Share your work clearly in two minutes
A lightning talk is a fast-paced presentation designed to highlight the most important part of your project. You will use two slides and speak for two minutes to communicate your key message clearly, quickly, and effectively.

Slide 1: Your research story

This slide sets up the big picture.

Include:

- A short, clear title
- Your name, major and faculty mentor
- Your main research question, goal or creative focus
- One to two sentences of background or context
- A very brief description of your approach

Think of this slide as the setup — it tells the audience *what question you asked* and *how you explored it*.

Slide 2: Your takeaway message

This slide delivers the key point you want people to remember.

Include:

- Your main finding, insight or outcome
- One strong visual if applicable
- Why your project matters — relevance, impact, or contribution
- Optional: one short line about what comes next

Your audience should be able to summarize your project in one sentence after this slide.

Suggested timing

- **0:00–0:20:** Introduce the project and why it matters
  - State your question or creative focus. Explain why it matters
- **0:20–0:45:** Describe your approach
  - Summarize your method in one or two clear sentences. Avoid technical details.
- **0:45–1:30:** Share your key finding or contribution
  - Highlight the single most important result or insight
- **1:30–2:00:** Explain significance and close
  - Why does this matter to your field or community?

End your lightning talk by briefly acknowledging your faculty mentor.

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Tips for a strong lightning talk

- Focus on one main idea
- Use large fonts and minimal text
- Let visuals support your message
- Practice your timing
- Speak conversationally and clearly
- Make eye contact and show enthusiasm

What not to do:

- Do not overload slides with text
- Do not explain every detail of your methods
- Do not try to cover your entire project
- Do not go over time

First-time presenter tips

You belong here
If this is your first time presenting, feeling nervous is normal. Every experienced presenter started exactly where you are now.

A few things to remember:
- You were accepted because your work is worth sharing
- People are excited to learn from you, not judge you
- You know your project better than anyone else in the room

How to calm nerves before presenting

- Practice your opening sentence until it feels natural
- Visit the space early so the room feels familiar
- Take a slow breath before you start talking
- Focus on one person at a time when explaining your work

During your presentation

- Start with the big picture before the details
- Use your poster or slides as a guide, not a script
- It is okay to pause and think before answering questions
- If you do not know an answer, say so and explain what you would explore next

Reframe questions as a good thing

Questions mean someone is interested in your work. Many viewers are learning alongside you, not testing you.

Helpful responses include:

- “That is a great question. What I found was…”
- “I am still exploring that part, but here is what I know so far…”
- “That is something I would like to study next.”

After the presentation

- Take a moment to recognize what you accomplished
- Jot down feedback or ideas while they are fresh
- Remember that every presentation makes the next one easier

QUICK REMINDER:
You do not have to be perfect. You just have to be clear, prepared and willing to share your work.