

TIMESTEP

How to Navigate the AAS Winter Meeting

Wednesday, December 3rd

5:00 - 6:00 pm, Steward N305

A team of astrophysics graduate students will be sharing their tips and tricks for how to best navigate the AAS winter conference in Phoenix in January. They'll share advice on presenting your work, connecting with grad school representatives and potential advisors, and taking advantage of all the conference has to offer.

Tips for presenting your work

Poster Presentation Tips

- **Treat it like a conversation.**
 - Usually 1-5 people will come up to you at a time, and you give them a **short** spiel about your project.
 - Practice this spiel ahead of time - shouldn't feel like a formal presentation
 - Be prepared to answer common questions - what's next? why does it matter?
- **Take the opportunity to network.**
 - Engage with your audience - ask them where they're from and what kind of work they do. They likely approached your poster because it relates to their research topic.
 - Great way to get to know people in your subfield, and get helpful comments!
 - Sell yourself - mention if you're applying to grad schools or REUs
- **Make it look exciting!**
 - People are more likely to approach posters with big flashy images.
 - The poster face should have big pretty pictures/graphs, and then you can have the wordier sections as things you can click on to enlarge.
 - Bullet points are easier to read than paragraphs, and you can **bold**, **color**, **enlarge**, etc. text to emphasize key points
- Have a water bottle with you. You may be talking for an hour straight with a variety of different groups.

Oral Presentation Tips

- You only get 5 minutes! So make sure you focus on:
 - Necessary background information
 - You don't need to explain redshift, but you do need to briefly explain/define terms that are specialized in your subfield (e.g., JADES = JWST Advanced Deep Extragalactic Survey)
 - Major results
 - Try breaking your project down into a few simple questions and answers
 - Key figures
 - Important takeaways
- **Don't provide technical details.** That's how you lose your audience and your time
 - Usually the things that take the longest and are the most difficult (e.g., debugging code) are the things you *shouldn't* talk about in your presentation
- Unlike this slide, don't put too many words! Keep a nice balance of words + figures
- Explain your figures. Don't assume people will automatically know how to interpret them
 - Explain the axes and clearly state the trend that the plot shows. **Put it into simple words**
 - Tell people what they should think
 - Consider making your slide title a short sentence that explains the main takeaway of the figure

Oral Presentation Tips

- Use transitions and animations to guide your audience's eye.
 - “Appear” and “dissolve” functions
 - If you want your audience to focus on one particular figure, just show that one figure while you're talking about it. Don't show anything else that could distract your audience
- **Less is more.** It's better to have less content and talk at a slower pace through your presentation than to put too much and talk way too fast. Aim for **no more than 6 slides** including your title.
- If you get asked a question and you don't know the answer, that's okay. **It happens all the time.**
 - **Take your time.** You can take a second to think about it.
 - **Don't make up an answers.** It's better to say “I don't know” than to confidently say something incorrect
 - You can spitball an answer, but make sure it's clear that you're spitballing
 - Get-out-of-jail-free cards:
 - “That is beyond the scope of this project.”
 - “I don't remember offhand, but let's talk later and I'll see if I can get you an answer”
 - People are generally nice to undergrads!

Leveraging the meeting for grad school connections

For Seniors who are Presenting:

- Grad School & REU Fair: 5:30 - 7:00 pm Sunday, January 4th
- Approach the grad school tabling area *before* your presentation and invite representatives from every school you applied to to your talk/poster
- Dress to impress
 - You don't need to wear a suit or dress if you don't want to
 - Wear clothes that make you feel comfortable but look professional
 - Astronomy-related clothes and accessories are great conversation starters!
 - Wear your most "formal" outfit the day you present
- Ask questions about the programs you applied to
 - Questions like: "Can you tell me more about the computing resources available to your graduate students?"
 - Questions NOT like: "Have you seen my application? When do I find out if I get in?"
 - These people probably aren't controlling whether or not you get in - don't spend too much time trying to sell yourself. You did that already with your application!
- For some targeted networking, you can look for presentations from researchers in groups that you might be interested in joining if you are admitted to their department

For Juniors:

- **Go to the Grad Fair!**
- Talk to representatives from programs you are interested in.
 - Don't worry too much about making them remember you/your presentation
 - Try to get a better sense of which programs you'd like to apply to next year
- Start to think about what you might want in a graduate program
 - Physics or astronomy?
 - If astronomy: do you want to take physics classes?
 - Access to telescope time or computing resources?
 - What do you want the grad experience to be like?
- Get free stuff!

Taking advantage
of all the meeting
has to offer

General Tips

- If there's a special session you're interested in (e.g., 'how to give a good presentation'), see if your advisor will pay for you to go
- Get as much free stuff as possible
- Don't be afraid to talk to people from other institutions. There's many opportunities:
 - Go ask people about their posters
 - If you're too nervous to ask questions after an oral presentation, approach the speaker later on and ask one-on-one. People are generally happy to talk to anybody about their work
 - Send LinkedIn connection requests to people you talk to - include a message reminding them that you met at AAS
- Go to the plenary talks, even if they aren't in your field - they're aimed at a broad audience and cover interesting, current topics in astronomy
- Be polite and engaged: try not to leave sessions early or be obviously on your phone/doing other work
- Find people to grab dinner with and make a couple of new friends!

Contacts



Christa DeCoursey: cndecoursey@arizona.edu

Gabe Weible: gweible@arizona.edu

Aafaque Khan: arkhan@arizona.edu

Hayden Foote: haydenfoote@arizona.edu

Jeniveve Pearson: jenivevepearson@arizona.edu

Meredith Stone: meredithstone@arizona.edu

Logan White: lawhite@arizona.edu