Developing Your Message

This is summarized from an American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) video presentation on message development by Denise Graveline (to watch full video go to http://www.aaas.org/page/develop-your-message-3-points):

Message development is one of the most useful professional skills you can acquire. It will help you communicate with your friends and family, the general public, funding agencies, colleagues, and students. It is as useful for professional presentations as it is for talking to your neighbor.

Your message should be **miniature** (short and simple), **memorable** (use vivid language and lively images), and **meaningful** (convey what it means to you personally and how it is relevant to your audience).

Communication requires that your message be received--both heard and understood. It is not enough that you write or speak. If no one reads or listens and understands, communication has not occurred.

Miniature: Details are critical to science and engineering, but they sabotage communication of your research message. Don't get bogged down in details! A method for avoiding this is to choose **three key points** for your message. The three points could be three key findings, three categories of findings, three interesting questions, three major barriers to be overcome in solving an engineering problem, or three essential components of your experimental method. Selecting three key points is useful for a very short message--the "elevator speech"--or for a half-hour conference presentation. For a short exchange, you can give the bare minimum; for a longer presentation, you can use the three key points as an organizational strategy that helps both you and your audience remember your message.

Memorable: The three key points framework is useful because it is easy for you to remember, and if it's easy for you to remember it will be easy for your audience to remember as well. You can enhance this effect by labeling your three points using alliteration (e.g., miniature, memorable, meaningful), similar-sounding words (e.g., elegant, relevant, independent), or repetitive phrases (e.g., "These results are easy to understand, easy to remember, and easy to disprove.") Analogies, metaphors, and similes provide images that allow your audience to understand something unfamiliar and make your message stick in their memories.

Meaningful: Your message will be heard, understood, and remembered if it is meaningful to both you and your audience. Who is your audience? You should be aware of such characteristics as age, nationality, interest, assumptions, education level, motivation. Don't use examples and references that are dated; if you want to use popular culture to make your talk more relevant, be sure you use popular culture your audience can relate to. Your message will come across to an audience as meaningful if you can convey what your work means to you--**be personal!** Express

the passion you feel for your research, the excitement, frustration, sense of adventure, feelings of fulfillment. If it bores you, it will bore your audience.

To incorporate the three-key-points framework into a presentation, use the standard three-part format: Tell your audience what you're going to tell them; tell them; and then remind them of what you have told them. For a three-key-point presentation, include a brief statement of the three key points in your introduction. Elaborate the three key points during the body of your presentation; this is where you can add as much detail as is relevant and as time allows. Briefly summarize the three key points in your closing remarks.

The AAAS website has two videos with Denise Graveline, one on developing your message: http://www.aaas.org/page/develop-your-message-3-points
And another on working with reporters:
http://www.aaas.org/page/developing-your-message-reporters