

EXERCISES FOR COMMUNICATING MATH IN ELEVATOR SPEECHES AND BEYOND

There are many exercises that can help you communicate more effectively. Here are some you can start doing right now at the JMM.

- (1) Do the half-life exercise from the “Creating Effective Elevator Speeches” workshop. It is best to do with a partner, so that you can get another person’s feedback. If you do not have a partner, though, you can record yourself on your phone.
- (2) In talks or conversations where the speaker does an excellent job communicating, deliberately take note of what they did well. You have lots of opportunities to do this at the JMM!
- (3) You’re bound to end up in communication that does not go well. Try to figure out why it did not go well. Did the speaker use jargon? Was it unclear to you why the topic mattered?
- (4) If you’re concerned about delivery (as opposed to content): Record your voice on your phone, without video. Also try recording video and playing it back without sound. When you share different kinds of messages, how does your delivery change? Which elements of your most engaging deliveries can you also incorporate into your less engaging ones? Next step: How does your choice of content impact your delivery? How can you use the answer to that question to improve your delivery in general?
- (5) Find the simplest example that illustrates each concept you want to explain. Choose carefully! Your choices should be both accessible and helpful.
- (6) Make plans to practice with someone from this workshop. Do the half-life game with a different topic. Or introduce other constraints, such as limiting the number of words you can put in a sentence or limiting the length of the words you can use.
- (7) Constraints can provide a fun and silly way to find new ways to communicate your message, especially if you find yourself in a rut. With a partner, play the “Alphabet Game:” The first word of your first sentence starts with A. Your partner’s first word has to start with B. When you respond, your first word has to start with C. And so on, until you’ve made it through the alphabet.
- (8) Try playing this game with a partner: One of you gives your presentation like in the workshop, while the other listens. This time, though, the listener yells “Ding!” whenever the speaker uses jargon or is otherwise unclear. The speaker immediately has to replace what they said with something the listener finds clear. The listener can Ding the new statements again and again until the speaker replaces the unclear statement with a clear one. Advanced version: Ding other parts of the presentation, just for fun and to see what new versions the speaker comes up with on the spot.
- (9) Create opportunities to get implicit feedback, and analyze it for yourself. In the workshop, you received explicit feedback. Every time you communicate with someone, though, their responses and reactions provide feedback to you. At the JMM, you have many opportunities to collect this kind of feedback. Deliberately reflect on it. What part of your message frequently resonates? Where do you frequently lose people? Experiment with modifications here at the JMM, while you have lots of opportunities for quick, informal interactions with many mathematicians.

This collection of exercises is for participants in Ellen Eischen’s “Creating Effective Elevator Speeches” workshop at the 2026 Joint Mathematics Meetings. It is adapted from her joint work with Heather Barnes, which has been supported by the Williams Fund and by National Science Foundation under Grants No. 1751281 and 2302011. For further information, please contact eeischen@uoregon.edu.