

Lightning Talks

Lightning Talks are a series of 5 minute talks/presentations by different speakers, each introducing a topic or idea very quickly, but in a clear and insightful manner. The presenter has only 5 minutes to deliver key messages, and so typically uses only 3–5 slides. The timing of the slides and the presentation is strictly enforced. If speakers are confident enough, they can forget using slides altogether and present using ‘prompt cards’.

A good lightning talk is insightful, inspiring, thought-provoking, useful, controversial, or enlightening. Lightning talks are almost always fun, for both the speaker and the audience.

If you are a novice speaker, a lightning talk gives you the opportunity to present for the first time without having to create a formal presentation. Equally it is also an opportunity to give a presentation at an early stage of a piece of research.

Tips for presenters:

- Use only a few words and one large image per slide
- Get right to the heart of the topic and present your key idea early in your talk
- Make sure you go slow and steady
- Reduce the amount you say to the essentials only
- Be dynamic, but beware of speaking too fast to cram in everything that you want to say, especially as the audience may not be native English speakers
- Share information but resist the temptation to explain in detail.

Two popular variants: Ignite and Pecha Kucha

Ignite: This is a Lightning Talk with exactly 20 slides, each of which is displayed for 15 seconds for a total duration of 5 minutes. The slides are advanced automatically via a timer. This makes for a more fast-paced session. Ignite is more challenging for presenters because they must match their words correctly to the pace of the slides, ensuring that they neither run out of time on a given slide, nor have long pauses. If well done, the rapid pace of the slides can make an Ignite session quite entertaining. Rehearsing in advance is even more important than for a standard Lightning Talk. See <http://igniteshow.com/>.

Pecha Kucha: This is a very similar commonly used variant, with 20 slides and 20 seconds per slide. <http://www.pechakucha.org/>.