

Economy Connection

Guidelines for Speaking to Non-Economists

This is an evolving set of guidelines, based on the experience of speakers, audience members, and people who invite speakers to events. Please add your comments, as well as suggestions for supplementary materials.

Beforehand...

1. Before the event find out as much as possible about the people you will be speaking to, and their event. How much do they know about economics? Do they want a lot of detailed information to help them in a specific battle, or do they want to understand basic principles? What is their experience (educational, political, work, etc.)? How long do they want you to speak? What types of presentations have been successful with their audiences in the past? Do they think a lot of audience involvement would be good? What is their political perspective? Are they open to a discussion of socialist possibilities, or do they want to focus on what is happening now?

Style...

2. Unless requested to do otherwise, keep the presentation short, and spend more time on discussion and questions.

3. Try to involve your audience. Relate your talk to their personal experiences and concerns. If you are talking about globalization, talk about how it affects their own jobs, purchases, political rights, etc. Ask them questions, and let them know when they are making a good point. One EC member says she passes out a questionnaire at the beginning of a talk, just to establish audience involvement – even if the questions aren't related to the subject of the talk!

4. Consider starting your talk with a story. Don't minimize facts, figures and theories, but supplement them with stories, real life situations, quotes, historical detail, etc. Bring references, in case your figures are challenged.

5. Check periodically to see if your audience seems interested. If you notice that people are leaving, try another approach, or ask them how they would like to proceed.

6. Focus on a small number of points, and repeat them in different ways. Don't cram everything you know about a subject into a short presentation.

7. Try to avoid, minimize the use of, or at least carefully explain, economic terms that most people don't understand. Don't avoid discussing theories, but establish clear connections to real events, and go back and forth frequently between the theory and a concrete example.

8. Make eye contact frequently, and don't read a paper.

9. Speak slowly, and make sure people can hear you. Sound systems are often poor.

10. The Right is good at creating phrases and images about crime, welfare, hard work, bootstraps, etc. If you can think of any progressive ones, use them. A few examples from recent URPE talks are describing free trade as a "race to the bottom"; or comparing the market to planning in terms of whether you are trying to choose a restaurant or win a war.

11. If possible, give some examples of how people have fought back in the past and what they might do in the future. If the audience is composed of members of a political group, you can probably learn as much from them on this question as they can from you.

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Supplementary Materials...

12. Bring articles, photos, maps, etc.

13. If you use charts and graphs use them sparingly, keep them simple, and also express the thought in words.

14. There are a number of unions, economics groups, etc. that publish popular economics materials. Some of the economics groups are listed below. If you have trouble finding what you are looking for, call Economy Connection and maybe we can help.

Center for Popular Economics, PO Box 785 Amherst, MA 01004

413-545-0743 Programs@PopularEconomics.org <http://www.populareconomics.org/>

They have summer institutes for political activists, travelling “road shows” mostly on urban issues, and have a large number of radical and progressive economists in their organization. Their publications include Nancy Folbre’s *Field Guide to the U.S. Economy*, and *The War on the Poor: A Defense Manual*.

Dollars & Sense, 740 Cambridge St., Cambridge, MA 02141

617-876-2434 or fax 617-876-0008. dollars@dollarsandsense.org <http://www.dollarsandsense.org/>

They have a good web site. They also know lots of people. Over the years they have published many readable articles on economic issues.

Economic Policy Institute, 1660 L Street NW, Suite 1200, Washington, DC 20036

phone: 202-775-8810; fax: 202-775-0819; email: epi@epinet.org; web: <http://epinet.org/>

EPI is a progressive think tank. Its members have done a lot of work on social security, living wage, etc.

United for a Fair Economy, 37 Temple Place, 2nd Floor, Boston, MA 02111

voice: 617/423-2148 fax: 617/423-0191 <http://www.ufenet.org/>

They focus on inequality, and have some really effective street-theater type workshops. They have lots of large, clear charts.

There are some union publications, like *Common Sense Economics – The Basic Rap* by the AFL-CIO, or *Meeting the Political Challenges of the 1990’s: A Rank & File Economics and Political Action Training Program* by CWA. Like the UFE materials, these include a lot of clear charts and simple exercises.

Monthly Review Press, 122 W. 27 St., NY, NY 10001, <http://www.monthlyreview.org/index.html>, has published a number of books that are simply written, including their “Cornerstone” collection. Topics include jobs, health, the environment, etc.

15. Other media, like music and videos, can also be useful. Michael Moore’s TV shows and movies have wonderful segments on inequality, politics, corporate power. People’s Music Network for Songs of Freedom and Struggle has lots of members who do political song writing and performing. There are groups that distribute videos.

We have been working on an expanded list of resources. If you have suggestions to add, or if you need suggestions for a project, please contact Ruthie Indeck at soapbox@comcast.net or 201-792-7459. If you have a copy of a popularly accessible book, pamphlet or flyer you feel would be useful for EC, please send it along. It is easier to make recommendations to callers if we can actually see the material.