

Coordinating Public Viewing Sessions

TCAA Guide #5

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VERSION 1.4

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The TCAA Board of Directors reviewed and approved this set of observing session guidelines on this date. Public viewing session (PVS) coordinators, speakers, and assistants are encouraged to adhere to these guidelines as closely as possible.

Public Viewing Sessions

Each PVS will consist of the following activities:

- A 20- to 30-minute PowerPoint presentation focusing on the topic(s) for that evening.
- A 10- to 15-minute laser-mediated sky lecture if the sky is tolerably clear.
- An observing session using the Sugar Grove Observatory (SGO) and ground-based telescopes assuming the sky is clear.
- An open house at Sugar Grove Observatory (SGO) with viewing through the main instrument.
- An open house at Prairie Sky Observatory (PSO) unless photographic imaging is being made available to youth and other visitors in the visitor center of the SGO.

PVS Coordinators

- There shall be two coordinators for each PVS.
- At least one of the two coordinators must be an observatory key holder.
- PVS coordinators are typically the designated speaker for the evening during which they speak.

Work of PVS Coordinators

Coordinators:

- should promote this event to the media such as the *Pantagraph* ("Go" section), through the TCAA listserv, through TCAA@TCAA.US (direct email to prior registrants working with Lee Green), through our Facebook page (working with Carl Wenning) and through our Twitter page (working with Tim Stone).
- should coordinate their actions with others so that work isn't at cross-purposes.
- need not be presenters, but they merely must arrange for the two presentations that evening, and ensure that sufficient numbers of telescopists and telescopes are available for the observing session.
- are welcome to give either or both of the presentations and manage a telescope.
- should be familiar with the location of all needed materials (video projector, screen, laptop computer, extension cord, laser pointer, and light switches) and how they are set up and run.
- should be aware that observatory lap top computers should never be removed from either PSO or SGO for any purpose.
- should arrive on site at least 45 minutes (60 minutes is better) prior to the scheduled start of the PVS.
- should open the dome slit of the SGO early during warmer months to allow the telescope to come to thermal equilibrium with the surrounding air.
- should ensure the availability and use of both the SGO and PSO by arranging for assistants.
- should work to ensure the safety of all club members, guests, and telescopic and observatory equipment during PVS events.
- Make certain that Lisa Wentzel's PPT presentation about light pollution are up and running prior to the start of the main presentation, and ensure that Lisa's "Binocular Object of the Month" is electronically available online.

Preparing PowerPoint Talks

Speakers:

- should be well versed in the topic they plan to present.
- should prepare a PowerPoint presentation to assist in delivering thoughts and illustrating examples.
- should project their voices **loudly** and distinctly; listeners in back have a hard time hearing the speaker when there is significant noise from passing trains and traffic on the Interstate.
- are reminded that they should not have more than 10-20 words maximum per PowerPoint slide.
- are reminded that images and words should fill most of the PowerPoint slide in such a way as to ensure visibility at the back of the picnic shelter.
- should be observant of the fact that the audience is composed of a wide array of people, knowledge, experience, and interest. It is generally composed of the following:
 1. A few who are really, really interested in the technical aspects and details; so, if you include technical details, keep it to a minimum.
 2. A few who are just curious or are with a friend for an evening out and really want to learn about this stuff because it is fun and interesting; so, make sure your presentation is lavishly illustrated and avoid slides with all words.
 3. Lots of kids, so we need to watch the time and pace, and include something of interest for them; so, through in a bit of storytelling or mythology if it is relevant to the subject matter.
- are reminded that no font size should be smaller than about 28 points; anything less is hard to read, especially from the back of the picnic shelter.
- are reminded that PowerPoint slides should almost always include a graphic; don't provide text about star hopping; show them a graphic; don't just refer to galaxies, show them!
- are reminded that PowerPoint slides should have dark (gray or black backgrounds) and light (gray or tan) letters; this enhances dark adaptation.
- are reminded to end each presentation with a full-screen red slide; this helps the audience to exit the picnic shelter without destroying dark adaptation; it also benefits those outside with telescopes.
- should set up the video projector in such a way that it maximizes the use of the projection screen so people can see each slide clearly from the back of the picnic shelter.

Cancellation of a PVS

- The coordinator is responsible for making the call about whether a public viewing session is cancelled or not.
- Public viewing sessions should be cancelled in the event of truly inclement weather; in most cases this means active or imminent rain – especially thunder storms; tornado watches with threatening conditions and tornado warnings are also legitimate reasons for cancelling a PVS.
- If there is a question about the clarity of the sky and the possible cancellation of the PVS, coordinators should contact one of the two duly authorized “go to” people outlined in the PVS brochure (Carl Wenning or Lee Green).
- Cancellations should go out via email to the membership, and on both Facebook and Twitter accounts to the general public.

Setting up for a PVS

- The visitors center on the ground floor of SGO should be open for visitors to view images produced by our club's astrophotographers if not being used to image using the PSO telescopes.
- The general public generally should not be allowed to enter the telescope room of PSO due to possible damage.
- When possible, astronomical imaging (luminance channel) should be allowed using the equipment of PSO.
- Bring out A/V materials and electrical extension cord.
- Set up the screen, video projector, and laptop computer.
- Open the SGO, start, and sync the telescope so that it is immediately ready for service after the laser-mediated sky lecture.
- Make certain that the green laser pointer is available and working.

- Set out club membership forms of PVS schedules and another other free materials that we have for dissemination
- Turn off the bright outside lamp over the door of the Nature Center before the talk begins (and turn it back on after the session is over).
- Coordinators should encourage members in attendance to listen to the presentation.
- Have door prize and registration cards for emails as well as pencils and/or pen ready.
- Make certain that our PPT presentation about light pollution is running as visitors seat themselves in preparation for the evening's lecture.

Starting the event

An officer of the club:

- draws attention and draws the audience to order.
- tells a bit about the TCAA and point out the availability of membership brochures
- solicits names and email addresses by distributing TCAA Giveaway! drawing cards.
- explains the need to use parking lights/ filtered flashlights
- cautions people to drive with care in the darkness.
- points out the location of restrooms cautioning them about "pitfalls"
- notes the locations of the observatories and private telescopes
- introduces the speaker and topic for the evening.

The speaker:

- provides a brief overview of the evening's activities.
- uses a PowerPoint with black backgrounds and dim lettering and images.

During the event:

The speaker should:

- make the presentation light, lively, and fun.
- demonstrate the fact that (s)he is enjoying the topic too.
- should be inclusive, speaking to children and adults of many age, skill, and knowledge levels.
- "hook" the audience with an enticing question, problem, or puzzle.
- allow for as much audience participation as possible – by asking and receiving questions.
- finish the PowerPoint presentation with a red slide to protect dark adaption.
- deliver the sky lecture or get an assistant to do so.

Assistants should:

- take an accurate count of the number of people in attendance.
- make certain that the presentations of the speakers are not disrupted by others speaking loudly in the vicinity of the presenters, even if outside the picnic shelter.
- work to ensure the safety of all club members, guests, and telescopic and observatory equipment.

Telescope operators should:

- avoid talking loudly around their telescopes if they are not watching the presentation.
- be familiar with basic information about the objects they will be exhibiting.
- show the main topics featured in the presentation first before moving on to other objects.
- agree among themselves on which objects they will tend to focus.
- exhibit a wide range of showcase celestial objects including one of each of the following if possible: open cluster, globular cluster, galaxy, bright nebula, planetary nebula, crescent moon, quasar, comet, and all visible planets including Uranus and Neptune.
- allow those with "goto" telescopes to find the fainter, more-difficult-to-locate objects.
- be prepared with step stools and red-filtered flashlights to ensure the safety and comfort of observers.

Following the conclusion of the entire event

- Turn on the night light over the door of the Nature Center (assuming it was on at the start of the evening).
- Coordinators should make sure that all buildings are locked after the final departure of visitors.

Nature Center Building

- We are welcome open the Nature Center building so visitors can access the flush toilets.
- Turn off the bright street light on the side of the building if it is on.
- Turn on and leave on the lights on in the restrooms; keep the lights in the rest of the building off so as not to encourage needless exploration; the Nature Center building is not otherwise considered open at this time – only the restrooms.

A copy of these guidelines will be posted on the Sugar Grove Observatory bulletin board. Coordinators: please refer to these guidelines when conducting a Public Viewing Session.