

Informal Science Communication

Dallas Wulf
19 May 2023



Communication is a learned (and practiced) skill

- Like everything else, communication is a learned skill and you can improve with practice
- One typically spends a lot of time preparing formal communications, e.g. practicing a talk, getting feedback on a paper, etc.
- Informal communication skills are often overlooked, or considered to be innate
- Even after learning a skill, a certain amount of practice is needed to maintain it



Know your audience

- As with formal communication, it's essential to know your audience
- Audience is more than just the person—it's also the context and the environment
- Questions to help assess your audience:
 - What is their background?
 - What are their interests?
 - What is their motivation, or why are they listening to you?
 - What will be their expectations, given the context?
 - Where are you and what's happening around you?



What's your audience?



What's your audience?

Audience

- Children
- Students
- Undergrads
- Grads
- Faculty
- Reporters
- Retirees
- Amateur/Citizen
- Scientists
- Politicians

Location

- Museum
- Classroom
- Seminar
- Journal Club
- Conference
- News Interview
- Job Interview
- Bar or Restaurant

Context

- 1min, 10min, 1hr...
- Time of Day
- Captive vs Mobile
- Proximity to Food and/or Booze
- Stakes
- Competition/Shared Platform

Explaining gravity 5 ways



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QcUey-DVYjk>



Explaining gravity to a child

- Did anything surprise you?
- What details/content did the speaker emphasize?
- Would you do anything differently?



Favorite science communicator

- Science communicators/popularizers can be a great resource for finding informal communication strategies
- Think of your favorite science communicator:
 - What is their motivation?
 - What is their targeted audience?
 - What is their usual medium?
 - What makes them effective?





Activity: Elevator Pitch

- Scenario: You're at a conference banquet, waiting in line at the bar. A Nobel Prize winner gets in line behind you. You introduce yourself, and they ask about your research. All the sudden, the line seems to be moving very fast...
- Being able to succinctly communicate your research is valuable skill in both formal and informal contexts.
- It's also a great exercise for efficient communication in general.



Activity: Elevator Pitch

1. Form groups of 3 and decide who will be the first speaker.
2. Speaker: In 60s, describe your research
3. Audience: Repeat back to speaker what you understood and offer relevant feedback (e.g. “you lost me when...”)
4. Rotate roles and repeat steps 2 & 3.
5. Repeat steps 2-4, this time in 30s
6. Repeat steps 2-4, this time in just 15s



Activity: Elevator Pitch

- Was this easier or harder than you expected?
- Were you surprised by anything?
- Besides making an elevator pitch, what other types of communication could this exercise be adapted to? What about written forms of communication?
- What would you change if you were talking to a different audience?
- Check out <https://hemingwayapp.com/> as a resource for writing!