EMBO Course Proposal

Communicating science to non-specialists

Do your family and friends look puzzled when you try to explain your research? Would you like to inspire the public about your work and science in general but are unsure how start? This workshop will help. In it, you will not only learn how to communicate your research effectively to non-scientists, but will also have the chance to put theory into practice with the help of an award-winning professional science journalist.

The workshop covers:

•How to pitch your explanation at the right level without oversimplifying or “dumbing down”.
•How to structure information so your audience can understand it easily.
•What kind of language to use or avoid.
•How to spark enthusiasm and maintain interest.

First session: 09:00 to 10:30

- Introductions and aims. Brainstorm: why bother with science outreach?
- Opportunities: how you can get involved in communicating with non-specialists (public talks, schools outreach, blogging and new media, traditional mass media).
- How the emphasis has shifted from the public understanding of science to public engagement and why this is important. Case study: public engagement and synthetic biology.
- Fundamental principles of communicating to non-specialists.
- Exercise: In the space of one minute explain your work to a colleague, who plays the role of a non-scientist. Reverse roles and repeat. Feedback and discussion.
- How to structure your communication effectively for non-specialists.
- Case study: how a science writer turns an academic paper into a popular-style article.
- How to inspire an audience and show why your research matters: case studies.
- Exercise: delegates break out into groups of 5 or 6. Each group receives the same set of 3 press releases of varying quality. Groups rank the press releases and then report back to the workshop, saying what they liked/ disliked. This will prompt discussion and presentation of the following topics:
  - The use and abuse of statistics: how to communicate risk and uncertainty properly and why this matters.
  - Effective use of language: how to avoid jargon and communicate clearly and vividly.

Coffee break: 10:30 to 11:00

Second session: 11:00 to 13:00

- Exercise: Put it into practice! Start drafting a popular science-style explanation of your work.
- A second pair of eyes: how being edited can help.
- Exercise: delegates return to the pairs they formed for the first exercise of the day. They edit each other's articles, pointing out jargon and structural errors.
- Some volunteers then read out their stories for tutor feedback and group discussion.
- Storytelling: how narrative is used to sustain attention when communicating science in longer formats, such as public lectures and presentations to schoolchildren.
- Case study: delegates analyse a *Nature* cell biology feature to identify narrative and structural elements.
- Compelling hooks: great ideas to draw in an audience for longer format communication: examples of good hooks.
- Final exercise: delegates think of possible hooks they could use to communicate their own work. Some volunteers present their hooks for discussion and feedback.
- Final questions.
- ENDS

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