

## **I said, “Do you speak my language?” Using media variety to communicate science beyond academia**

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A lot of science communication effort is aimed at improving our science teaching skills to achieve better learning outcomes for students of science. When communicating science to non-student, non-scientific audiences there are a number of different and additional variables to consider about the people to whom one is communicating. These include audience demographics, perspective, and desire/willingness to become informed. From social scientists to teachers, politicians, and little old ladies these audiences can pose interesting challenges to the scientist science communicator. Despite the differences among audiences, there are also some remarkable similarities, which means that many of the techniques and tools employed to achieve the desired outcomes in one audience are transferrable to others.

It is also critical that science communicators take appropriate stock of the purpose of the communication. Knowing whether you are trying to change someone’s mind, to convey key facts they need for decision-making, or merely to titillate them are important distinctions for guiding preparation and expected outcomes; and they are in many ways different from the goals of teaching in an educational setting.

Issues of communicating with unengaged audiences, and to people who cling to preconceived notions, or are unwilling to change their minds in the face of scientific evidence – moving beyond “preaching to the choir” – are also of importance moving forward in the field of science communication. Indeed, whilst these audiences tend largely to be met by skeptic bloggers, who repeat scientific results with the hope that someone will “see the light” and change their mind, it must be recognised that these audiences require a different approach. Key concepts in communicating science to audiences across a broad spectrum are: how to get the right pitch, how to generate enthusiasm and engagement, how to select the right medium, and ultimately how to achieve the desired learning outcomes. In many cases, it’s a matter of speaking the right language.