

## ASA Early Career Researcher Mentoring Workshop – Session summary

Session Topic: Public Outreach and the Media  
Not Takers: Boris Haeussler, Alex Hill, Stas Shabala

Discussion Leader: Helen Sim

If you only remember three things from this talk, remember these...

1. Outreach is important for **them, us and you!**
2. **“Know your audience”** – It’s important to pitch your press release/talk/activity to the right level for the audience to be conceived well. Don’t assume pre-knowledge.
3. **“Keep it simple”** - It's important to be non-scientific and short enough to catch the attention. Use simple language!

### Session summary/notes

This talk/slot concentrated more on media and interaction with the media, but the thinking and the concepts can apply to outreach in general.

#### **Reasons for outreach:**

Everyone needs to think about their very own reasons, to decide why, in his own busy lives, he is going to devote time to doing media/outreach.

1 minute thinking time & discussion on why we should do outreach

**I’m doing it for us** (what the 'institution' you're attached to and the astronomy community as a whole wants):

- Giving your work out to the public is brand management, perhaps with the hope that it helps to get resources from the public
- Institution provides resources to get message out there
- Your project will benefit

**I’m doing it for them** (the general public, the people we want to give it back to)

- Astronomy has a social license to operate.
- It will provide knowledge.
- May want to inspire other people in particular circumstances. It inspires other people to show them what's possible (e.g. from underprivileged backgrounds).
- You owe it to the community
- It might engage them with science
- You are paid for by tax money.

**I’m doing it for me:**

- I like it. It makes me look good. It can feel rewarding and motivating for your everyday work.
- It makes me look good and it looks good on my CV
- You're going to make your mum proud.
- This is part of my job.
- It's good practice: I will have to explain my science to people who know nothing about it throughout my career, so I should practice now.
- When you explain things, you refresh the basic skills. Good way to get over performance anxiety. You will find the gaps in your understanding, refreshing your skills helps you stay up to scratch

## **Your institution does provide resources to get your story out.**

### **Who's the audience? What do they want?:**

- most people in the world are not like you, they don't know these things:
- 30% of Australians believe it takes 1 day for the Earth to go around the Sun
- worldwide, only ~25-40% of the population cares about science. Only a small subsample of those actually looks for information => It is hard to reach them (and astronomy won't reach them, if they are not looking for it)
- With astronomy, you're not generally trying to reach the population that doesn't care about science
- There are only ~13000 astronomer out of 7 billion people! We are a small minority!

### **What do people WANT from astronomers?**

- things they could comprehend
- an interesting story
- emotion.

Additions from the audience:

- pretty pictures
- concepts easy to understand
- answering the big questions
- Interesting personalities
- they want to be entertained
- they want information in simple language

### **Example: why is Fred Watson so popular?**

- Quirky
- Not condescending
- Approachable
- Makes people feel they understand things
- he's emotional about the things he explains

### **Exercise:**

Your 12 year old niece has project at school and wants to explain what an astronomer does. Some examples, generally well written. Unfortunately, those were not collected and we cannot quote them here

### **Exercise: Describe a piece of work in 8 words!**

- title must get to the essence of things
- not just outreach: also proposals etc.
- example: "Old person smell really exists, scientists say" (story in Time, courtesy of Bryan Gaensler)

### **Classify press releases (with examples):**

- Discovery story
- Achievement story
- Problem solved story
- "Revolutionary" story (faster-than-light neutrinos)
- Problem unsolved/mystery story
- Quirky story ('hot ice')
- Human interest story (high school student found something)
- Picture story
- Boring, bad story (too long title and abstract, too many details without a single core point).

if you have a story about a large piece of work with many different aspects (a survey, for instance), then you need to pull out single interesting finding, **a nugget of information**, and make that the focus of your media release.

**It's important to be non-scientific and short enough to catch the attention**

### **How to learn about interacting with the media:**

- Watch others do it
- Take media training
- Do practice interviews
- Explain to innocent lay-people
- Practice in front of a mirror

**Every university has a science officer that will help you prepare your topic for the public**

## Interesting quotes from the discussion

### **What does the public expect from astronomer?**

- “more interpretative dances”

### **SELECTED TWEETS DURING THE TALK:**

- Public outreach session: Why do it? Astronomy is the public's gateway drug to the broader sciences #ECRmentor
- .@sky\_pointer on doing outreach: clarify in your mind why you're doing it. #ecrmentor
- 30% of Australians believe it takes the Earth a day to move around the Sun #fb #ecrmentor
- Not everyone has our knowledge base [t.co/SyYqNIGE](https://t.co/SyYqNIGE) #ecrmentor
- Maybe astronomers should do more interpretive dances #fb #ecrmentor
- What do the general public want from outreach? To be entertained #ecrmentor
- The community wants the same from astronomy as they want from art - Andy Green #fb #ecrmentor
- Outreach and media session now. Most people don't have our knowledge base. 30% of Aussies think 1day 4 Earth to go round Sun: #ecrmentor
- People want to feel like they can understand the science issues. #ecrmentor
- Helen Sim from CSIRO: The press wants emotion, because that's what connects with the public #ECRmentor
- .@sky\_pointer: "Good science story needs to be captured in a 6-word headline." Here's a perfect example! #ECRmentor [t.co/6B30cGkW](https://t.co/6B30cGkW)
- Media communication: Large complex bodies of work, pull out the interesting nugget and hang the rest off it #ECRmentor
- .@sky\_pointer Example of how not to write a press release. #ECRmentor [t.co/4Y6MUIQo](https://t.co/4Y6MUIQo)
- How to learn to interact with the media: Practice in front of a mirror #ecrmentor
- .@sky\_pointer How to do good outreach: Watch others do it. Take media training. Do practice interviews. Explain to lay-friends. #ECRmentor