Communicating Science 101

The Curse of Knowledge

As scientists, a major obstacle for communication is overcoming the curse of knowledge. Once we know something, it's difficult to unlearn it in order to perceive the information the way our audience will. It is helpful to try and think about how people unfamiliar with a concept might understand it when they first encounter the information.

Know Your Audience

There is no one size fits all approach to communicating. You need to tailor your message to your audience and the format you will use to communicate this information.

• **Who are they?** Scientists, policymakers, students, the general public
• **What is their knowledge level?** Students vs. educated adults vs. experts
• **What are their interests?** Find a hook to engage them.
• **What are their beliefs and values?** Are there inherent conflicts between you and your audience?

Preparing Your Message

It’s not about what you say or how smart you sound—it’s about what your audience understands and finds interesting enough to remember.

**Zoom out.** As an expert in your field, you are immersed in the details when the audience needs to see the big picture first. Save the details for later.

**Focus on ‘why’ not ‘how’** you did your research. What’s the big picture?
Use the communication triangle to formulate your message.

**Communications Triangle**

Delivering Your Message Effectively

**Be conversational.** Speak at the same pace as you would to a friend. Pause. Avoid jargon and acronyms.

**Have confident body language.** Make eye contact. Don’t slouch. Eliminate distracting mannerisms (jingling coins in your pocket, tapping your fingers on the table.)

**Use a multimedia format.** Incorporate both verbal and visual inputs, such as text, pictures, animation, and video.

**Practice.** Internalize your content so that you can deliver it as comfortably as you would to a friend. Record a practice run on video to look for vocal fillers (um, ah) and distracting hand gestures.