THE QUICK INTRODUCTION TO EDUCATION AND PUBLIC OUTREACH (E/PO)

You Want to Reach Out and Share Your Work. Where Do You Start?

Reaching out to the public is a fantastic opportunity. It offers scientists a chance to give back to the community and to taxpayers. It offers the public a chance to ‘touch’ science close up, to be educated about basic principles and new developments, and it inspires people everywhere to consider their larger place in the universe. Once you’ve decided you’d like to give back, how do you start?

1. Consider your strengths and weaknesses, your proclivities and interests.

   Do you like talking to adults or kids - large audiences or small? Perhaps you don’t like talking at all, and would prefer to write, create animations, or engage with people through social media. If you feel strongly about improving science education for students, then you might prefer engaging with formal education opportunities (i.e., classrooms and school related activities), rather than informal ones (e.g., museums, science clubs, and libraries).

2. Match possible E/PO opportunities to your strengths.

   There are myriad ways to reach the public. Choose those venues and vehicles that most interest you, and that fit what you have to offer. Here are just a few examples:

   A. If you love talking to groups, consider: visiting classrooms, speaking at a library, talking at a planetarium or museum, or speaking at a star party.

   B. If you love writing, consider: guest blog posts, writing for popular science magazines, or producing a textbook.

   C. If you are interested in sharing the latest science events and discoveries, consider: popular news and science outlets, talks on Google hangout, updating a Twitter feed, or taking charge of a Facebook page.

   D. If you are interested in sharing the basic concepts and principles, consider: working with schools on curricula, reviewing textbooks for content errors, judging science fairs, or helping museums vet the science in upcoming exhibits.

3. Find the best use of your time.

   Your time is limited, so think about how to make the most with what you have. (See the guide for “Making the Most of your E/PO Time – Increasing Your Efficiency and Impact”)
4 Identify an education partner.

This step goes hand-in-hand with the following step, “Points of entry.” It is important to identify a person(s) already engaged in some aspect of education to partner in your efforts and connect with them (don’t be shy!). This may be the teacher of the class to which you wish to speak, the education director at a museum, or the leader of a Girl Scout troop. This person(s) can help you understand the venue you have chosen, and will be invaluable in ensuring you match your offerings to the needs of your chosen audience (the people you are trying to reach).

5 Identify your points of entry.

Any E/PO opportunity will have a place to start, and a way to make the connection and get engaged. This is an organic process that does not have only one right method. When looking for points of entry, consider:

A Your current personal community –
   The library you frequent, the church or PTA you attend, your contacts on Twitter or Facebook, your children’s school, and your friends and close colleagues. Approach the people who already know you and get their ideas and input. What is needed in your local community?

B Existing E/PO Programs – You don’t have to create your own program. A host of quality programs already exist of which you can become a part. Check for speaker’s series, space clubs, science nights at libraries, existing blogs, and other established venues where you can plug right in. (See the guide for “Making the Most of your E/PO Time – Increasing Your Efficiency and Impact.”)

6 Think about your audience and what they want and need.

It is easy to focus too closely on the very narrow or specific branch of technical research that most interests you. Consider the needs of the people you are trying to reach and educate, then see how what you do and know can uniquely inform what you present. Larger concepts such as basic scientific principles, the process of science, and critical thinking skills will fit the needs of many audiences. Note that your audience may have particular needs — for example, the content presented in most school settings is guided by specific education standards. Your partner(s) at your chosen venue will help ensure your offerings are properly targeted.

7 Find more Information.

Check [http://www.smdepo.org/people](http://www.smdepo.org/people) to find E/PO experts in your local area, at your institution, or working in your subject area. Your professional societies (AAS, DPS, AGU, GSA, etc.) have education and outreach specialists interested in pointing you in the right direction.