

S2E8: 3 common science communication mistakes you need to avoid

Hello everyone. Welcome back to the scicomm Toolkit podcast. The show for anyone who wants to share science in fun and creative ways so they can improve their confidence and skills to do so. I'm Dr Soph Milbourne but some of you may know me as Soph talks science and I will be your host.

Now I don't know about you but I am guilty of always wanting to create new projects or come up with new ideas when I a) already have too much on my plate and b) always thinking the next idea is bigger and better or give me new skills and c) when I've barely scratched the surface with this podcast project

So I feel bad that I want to start another podcast. In fact there are three ideas that I would love to pursue. There's a kids science podcast, a science meets food idea and a science meets travel idea. So if anyone listening is interested and wants to team up or even wants to pay me to create them then hit me up!

So just a reminder that if you resonate with this a little to reflect on why you want to do each project. Ask yourself which is most important to you or aligns best with your goals and work on that one to not burn out.

Enough small talk for today, instead I am here to talk to you today about some of the common mistakes you can make when learning the ropes of science communication and creating your scicomm whatever form or shape that takes.

There are some common mistakes that scientists make when they are communicating their research but I know that a lot of you listening to this are also creators so I wanted to share some of the mistakes I've made along the way as a creative scientist or a scientific creator - which ever way you want to look at it - and talk about this topic from a slightly different angle, so let's get to it.

So the first mistake to avoid is:

Trying to do it all yourself

If you want to grow and improve as a science communicator, especially if you are learning on the job through trial and error like I did, you need to ask for feedback, ask questions and ask for help.

There have been countless times where I have found myself wishing I had taken part in a particular Science Festival I wish I had asked that personal Instagram a question even the simplest question, I wish I had been more upfront about courses and other professional development opportunities that I could have gone on in my job, but also with networking and just saying hello to people making sure they know who you are how you can help them and also finding out how they can help you and yeah just ask people questions.

I really and truly believed I needed to figure it out by myself. now with the wonderful world of hindsight and years of science communication under my belt I have discovered that is completely not true and so many people out there who do science communication really

want to help you and will invest their time and answer your questions it's just a matter of asking them in the first place.

you can of course take the next step if you are able to or have opportunities and you can invest in books invest in courses to help you level up your skills but of course that are lots of free resources out there it's just a matter of investing your time in finding who you like learning from who you like listening to who you want to ask questions with and engage with.

so just now you are never on your own when you're trying to build up your science communication skills. at the Bare minimum you will have me in your corner as your little scicomm cheerleader

the second common mistake that you can make when train to get started in science communication and learn more kind of build on that and that is:

Just reading and learning new skills, not putting them into practice

I've been very lucky that in my full-time job as a science communicator I have had the opportunities to go on several different courses or to different conferences or meetings events. I might meet someone new I might learn about a new paper I should read or learn how to use a new bit of software that is going to help with my science communication goals. but if you're anything like me you could spend to complete days on this course and then have A little bit of a break from it if you're going back into the lab demo experiments or back to work whatever it is. but then when you finally come back to it and have to use those skills you've completely forgotten how to actually use them

one example for me was earlier this year I went on a course on how to use the Adobe Illustrator because in my previous job a lot of the academics were asking for support with creating graphical abstracts and images for journal covers and so on. but since that course finished I don't think I've even opened illustrator. now in part will be because I've moved jobs but the point is I spent 2 days trying to learn a new skill but then didn't take any action on it afterwards

so now if I do is I do not go on a course or invest in anything like that unless I have a project or work lined up afterwards to put those skills to the test and start actually practicing and embedding them in my brain building those neuronal connections. the same goes for any books I read if they are like learning development or self-help type books. but even if the books and reading are popular science books I do still read them with a notebook or something I've discovered recently is transparent sticky notes which are game changer and any thoughts or ideas I have as I'm reading these books I will drop them down and I will drop down why I like a particular phrase or why I don't like a particular structure so that is also helping me to refine my own writing style at the same time. the same for YouTube videos or podcast episodes and kind of half reviewing them or evaluating them as I go through to work out what I like what I don't like, and importantly why I don't like them so that one I'm also applying them to my own thanks communication stuff I'm thinking about how I can recreate those things in my own words in my own style and so on

so if you are investing time money energy into learning new skills festival that's fantastic but don't forget to put them into practice

the final mistake that I hear a lot and one you should avoid as much as possible is:

Starting on all platforms because you think you should, doing all the types of scicomm because you think you should

now you have heard me say before that it's important to experiment with different types of science communication and I still stand by that, but that doesn't mean you have to do them all at the same time. And yes of course there are benefits to being on multiple different platforms and doing different types of science communication, but every platform you add is creating more work even if you do repurpose things like I do.

I think the best advice I could share about how to try and avoid this mistake is to obviously start with one core platform and maintain that as your home for everything else. for me that was my blog everything you see from all my other channels and outlets are ultimately on my blog and on my website. once I had got settled with my blog routine I then started branching out into Instagram. and they are still my two probably main outlets the science communication still today of course I have podcast I am on other social media channels with varying degrees of success and and I do love videos I really want to start creating more of that. so it might sound very hypocritical of me to say don't be on all platforms, but it's taken me 5 years to get to this stage and I'm still not fully across all platforms.

when you're learning and trying to grow your confidence as a science communicator, you are going to be so much more successful doing that by focusing on one maximum two platforms or outlets and really understanding how you can use those to your benefit before branching out and experimenting with a new one.

but if you're a researcher listening to this you absolutely don't need to start a Twitter account and Instagram account be at science festivals have a website and so on and so on from today start with one and build up and up and up as you gain more confidence and no more about what you're doing and trying to achieve

as always the type of science communication that you do should always link back to your why so why are you doing science communication what are your goals what is your motivation, and of course who are you trying to reach

There are several other mistakes I've made along the way and others that I can talk about here but will just keep it to 3 for this episode, and they are:

Don't try to do it all yourself

don't just learn new skills and consume content without putting things into practice and improving your skills

and finally don't try and do everything at once and be across all different types of science communication from the start

welcome to today's DIY section of the podcast. this is the part where I give you an exercise a resource or a worksheet that you can work through straight away to start implementing those skills.

now based on what I've shared in today's episode that might sound a little familiar. so DIY section today is all linked to mistake number two. the hallway I have designed this podcast is to try and encourage you the listeners to take action on any skills or knowledge that you've learnt with these worksheets exercises and so on

Sofa today exercise I want you to actually go and do any of those exercises from podcast episodes that you've missed or haven't had time to do yet. go and discover your Wyvern doing science communication what is your motivation, there is a worksheet to really try and understand your audience and really start to get to know them, there is a storyboard template from our chat with Maren earlier this season, there are some top tips about presentations from Duncan also in this season.

and of course I'm sure there are loads of exercises or things you can do from outside the world of the scicomm toolkit. if you have been watching YouTube videos about how to do a particular animation, go and create the animation, you don't have to share it publicly but you're starting to make those connections in your brain so you can build that skill set up. if you've got any books you're waiting to read then go and read them by yourself so much transparent sticky notes and make notes as you're reading have a notebook for ideas so all your ideas are in the same place. make sure that when you're consuming content, you're not just consuming mindlessly, if you have stayed watching that tiktok video for more than 3 seconds what is it about that video that made you stay watching make a note of that and think about how you can apply that to your own tiktok videos as another example.

I know it can be hard to take those first steps and take action on things so if you need some accountability slide into my DMS share what you been up to sure what you want to do and I'll be there to support you

so I won't keep you any longer I hope you are sat there now raring to go and take action on something to start improving your scicomm confidence and leveling up your skills even more. the resources transcripts show notes for all of the podcast episodes are available on my website that's www.sophtalksscience.com/scicomm toolkit. You can find me on Instagram @soph.talks.science and I'm across over social platforms as well. There are many more scicomm tips and career insights on my blog and on this podcast.

If you enjoyed this episode then please leave a review. It is hugely appreciated, and I love getting your feedback so I know how I can do better. I wanted to say a huge thank you to Jessica W this week, who emailed me to say that 'the podcast has been impactful and made a difference for her, especially the episode with maren hunsberger. She says the conversation I had with maren is not only inspirational and aspirational but also offers concrete steps to implement and she looks forward to using the storyboard template with some internal resources. Thank you Jessica for such lovely words

Ans of course if you have any topics you would like to see covered you can email me on sophtalkscience@gmail.com. Loads of ways to get in touch. I'll see you in the next episode where I will be back with another incredible guest. Until then, go and take action on your scicomm and bring those science stories to life. Ciao.