

This beautifully written book is essential reading for researchers interested in connecting with the public in ways that generate interest and revive people's trust in science. Wagner and McKee lead by example, offering specific strategies for engaging in cooperative conversations about scientific findings. By centering the perspectives of nonscientists, the authors ground their approach in research evidence and provide useful tools that align with recent efforts to recognize the importance of community-engaged science.

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PREFACE

Scientists have always believed in the importance of communicating their results. Libraries are filled with technical journals that do just that. That kind of communication is critical for moving science forward, but the people who really care about what's in all those journals are mostly other scientists. This book is about a different kind of science communication that is aimed at a very different audience: nonexperts without formal training in your science.

Reaching people outside of the scientific bubble is important. We regularly encounter examples of people who ignore scientific findings and who express a lot of frustration with scientists and the scientific process. Our students, and sometimes even our colleagues, tell us they want to change how people view their work, but they don't know how to make that happen. We don't have all the answers, but we do know one technique that helps: talking with people. More specifically, we recommend talking with people about your science in ways that they can understand and engage with. Scientists who can have great conversations with anyone, anywhere are a key tool for promoting positive attitudes toward science.

We ourselves have a lot of these conversations, but we often have them in semistructured ways. We regularly work in museums

and at festivals sharing our science with members of the general public through brief educational activities. We have also trained a lot of students and colleagues to talk with people in these settings. In fact, we even wrote a book about how to make activities for people who visit informal learning settings and how to have conversations around those activities. If you want to know more about our approach, you can read that book (*How to Talk Language Science With Everybody*; Wagner & McKee, 2023) or check out Appendix A, where we summarize several of the key points we made there.

We know not everyone is interested in working in these kinds of informal learning spaces, and we also know not everyone is interested in our own specific research area of language science. So, we wanted to write a book that would take our core lessons about having a good science conversation with a nonexpert and apply those lessons to a broader set of situations. After all, engaging with people is something that can happen in lots of places—over the fence in your backyard, on an airplane, at the family dinner table, or really . . . anywhere.

The kind of conversations we have in mind are usually short and very interactive—the opposite of your average classroom lecture. They are cooperative, involve back-and-forth interactions, and engage and inspire all participants. Through this book, we'll offer advice on how to build a great conversation like that. Luckily, you have already had many conversations with family and friends, so you have a lot of experiences to draw on.

As you read this book, you'll learn a little more about our perspective and the importance of conversations (Chapter 1). We review the principles of cooperative conversation that underlie any great conversation, even ones not related to science (Chapter 2). Then, we'll focus in more detail on some ideas that are especially important for making a scientific conversation go well: showing respect for the person you're talking with, incorporating the knowledge that your partner brings to the conversation (Chapter 3); organizing

the information you're sharing with people to help them understand it, avoiding technical terms (Chapter 4); and getting comfortable with providing people with an incomplete (but still accurate) account of your science (Chapter 5). Finally, we talk about having fun (Chapter 6). Engaging with people and inspiring them to learn about your science should be enjoyable—both for the person you're talking with and for yourself.

Finally, we've got one extra piece of advice baked into the structure of the book. Talking about your science is a skill and, like any skill, it gets better with practice. We've put exercises in each chapter to encourage specific ways to practice your conversational skills. If you're using this book within a classroom context, we recommend using those exercises as activities during class. And check out Appendix B, where we give two example conversations with very different people. More practice with more kinds of people is better!

Throughout this book, we use examples from cognitive psychology to illustrate our points. We chose this area partly because we ourselves are most familiar with this part of psychology. But it's also an interesting area to have conversations about because many of the people you talk with will come to your conversations with ideas about how the mind works. There's a lot of built-in interest in the human mind that provides many openings for a great conversation.

Of course, not everything that people believe about the mind is going to be accurate. When faced with people who have it wrong, many of us have the instinct to confront in a direct fight. As you'll see in this book, that is not our approach. In fact, if you follow the advice that we suggest here, this is unlikely to happen. Probably the most critical piece of advice we offer is the idea that you should respect the person you're talking with. Showing respect helps you establish common ground and leads to more productive conversations. Sometimes, that may mean you have to agree to disagree on a given point. But more often than not, you'll be able to inspire someone to see

your trustworthiness as a scientist and the value in your science. We encourage you to think about your conversations as part of a long game of changing the way that people think about and interact with scientists. Each conversation you have matters and the more of them you have, the more good you will do. We don't expect to change the culture overnight, but we hope that you will join us in our long-term project by talking with many people about your science.

And as our long-term goals highlight, the principles we discuss in this book aren't specific to cognitive psychology. They apply just as well to developmental psychology, social psychology, and industrial/organizational psychology. For that matter, they apply just as well to botany, astronomy, and chemistry. Our advice is about how to have the conversation. It's up to you, the scientist, to know about the science. We would like to see more scientists of every kind having more great conversations with nonexperts about what they do. We've written this book so someone who is relatively new to their science can benefit. But the advice about conversations is something that any scientist at any level can make use of. We hope this book inspires more scientists to have more conversations.