Ten maxims for communicating science to a thinking audience

1. Know as much as possible about the intended audience for your communication. Have a clear picture in your mind of who you are addressing, if possible an actual individual.

2. There are no subjects that good communications can’t make interesting and intelligible to a thinking audience.

3. Never under-estimate the intelligence of the people you are addressing. They are not ignorant, simply uninformed.

4. Never over-estimate your audience’s interest in a particular subject matter.

5. To engage a thinking audience the communicator must actually care about the subject.

6. Gaining an advanced academic degree and writing academic papers are probably the worst possible preparation for communicating with a thinking audience, if that audience is outside the field of expertise of the academic.

7. One of the best ways to improve your own non-fiction writing is to read the best writing with a rigorously analytical eye. Ditto with listening to good oral communication about science and technology.

8. Tell a story. Narrative, narrative, narrative is the glue that binds the best communication for the thinking public.

9. Always read out loud any piece of writing intended for the thinking public. Ditto for a script or notes for oral communications.

10. Sweat the small stuff.

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June 2016