



Tips for science café moderators

What is a science café?

A science café is an open forum where members of the public can meet scientists to discuss topical issues in a relaxed environment. It is not a formal lecture or panel debate but an opportunity for everyone – both the audience and participating scientists to ask questions and express their opinions about a topic.

Your role as moderator

Your main role is to encourage discussion and participation from the audience as well as to give the welcoming and closing comments.

Before the event

- If you are not familiar with the topic (you don't have to be), have a look at some general articles to find out what the current issues are.
- Call all the participating scientist(s) for a quick chat before the event. This will enable you to find out how best to introduce them, make sure that they fully understand the science café concept and for you to learn a bit more about the topic.
- Arrive early to meet the participating scientists, run over the format for the evening and agree a general approach.

Format

1. Brief introduction by moderator

- Explain to the audience the general principle of the science café – that it is an informal discussion and everyone is welcome to express opinions and ask questions.
- Tell the audience that they are welcome to get up and fetch refreshments at any time.
- Encourage the audience to introduce themselves to each other at their tables.
- Stress that there are no stupid questions.
- If the topic is very controversial, explain that this is not a polarised debate and that everyone's views must be respected.
- Briefly introduce the participating scientist(s).

2. Brief introductions to the subject

Every scientist should be given 5 – 10 minutes to give a short introduction to the subject. If the scientists talk for longer than expected, politely interrupt and explain that they will get the opportunity to talk further about the subject during the course of the science café. It is important that the audience is engaged in the discussion as early on as possible.

3. Discussion

- Once the scientists have briefly introduced the topic, you should open the floor directly to questions from the audience. If the audience is reluctant to ask questions, have one ready to ask that will get the discussion going or prime someone in the audience beforehand to ask the first question.
- The conventional question and answer format rarely engages everyone. Instead encourage both the audience and scientists to express their opinions.
- Ensure that everyone has a chance to participate and try to prevent one person or idea from dominating the conversation.
- Encourage the scientists to actively ask the audience questions and seek points of view.
- If someone asks a complicated question, try to rephrase the question so that everyone can understand. Otherwise, ask the scientist to translate the question into simple language. If the question is very specialised or will take a long time to explain, suggest that the scientist speaks to the person directly afterwards rather than risk losing the audience's interest.
- Hands don't always have to be answered in the order they go up. When an interesting point comes up stay on the subject by asking the audience if they have more thoughts on the issue.

4. Bringing the science café to a close

Try to ensure that the café ends on time. Inform everyone when it is time for the last questions. If the discussion is waning before this, bring the café to a close slightly early. It is better to finish with an audience wanting more, than for people to get restless and start leaving before the end.

In your final words you could:

- Thank the participating scientists, organisers and the audience.
- Encourage people to stay and continue the discussions around the tables and to chat to the scientists on a more informal basis.
- Inform the audience of forthcoming science cafés and where they can get further information about them.