



Tips for science café organisers

Venues

- Your choice of venue is very important. Ideally, it should be a place where the audience can sit informally around tables and close to the scientists so that it is easy to see and hear them.
- Science cafés can be held in bars, cafés, bookshops, libraries, restaurants, art galleries and even shopping centres. The point is to go where your audience already congregates naturally.
- Choose a venue where people can purchase refreshments and encourage them to do this upon arrival. Avoid the use of noisy coffee machines during the café discussions.
- Just before the start of the café, take away any empty chairs from the very front so that the scientists are closer to the audience.
- Wherever possible, use head microphones for the scientists and a wireless hand-held microphone that can be passed around the audience.

Participating scientists

- Don't just pick your scientists based on their expertise of the topic but make sure they are good communicators too, are enthusiastic, able to make the subject engaging and discuss research without using technical jargon.
- It can be interesting to invite a panel of experts from different disciplines. The risk, however, is that the scientists talk too much to each other and that the audience become more observers than participants. Therefore, a maximum of three experts is recommended.
- Choose your moderator with care. The moderator may need to research the subject a little beforehand but doesn't need expert knowledge of the topic – that's the role of the scientists. It is however important that the moderator is good at engaging the public and encouraging others to speak rather than talking too much him/herself (often it is better to use a journalist than a scientist).
- Brief scientists and moderators well beforehand to ensure that they fully understand the science café concept (see our moderator and scientist briefing notes).
- Invite the scientists to go around the tables and meet some of the audience before the start.
- Talk to a few attendees directly after café finishes to get feedback.

Topics

- The topic should serve to catch people's interest and draw them into discussion so don't be prescriptive about the exact issues to be discussed.

- The best topics provoke a reaction in everyone. This includes research that is inherently fascinating or changes the way people think, as well as developments that have social impact or create ethical dilemmas.
- Present the topic in a way that relates to people's lives and/or is of current interest so that the audience feels able to contribute to a discussion.
- Add links to a couple of relevant articles on the subject on your marketing / web information so that the audience can read up a little about the subject beforehand.

Format

- Look for ways to get as many people involved as possible to encourage real discussion rather than just question and answers.
- Invite the scientists to bring an object to show to the audience and pass around.
- Start the evening with an unusual question or challenge to engage the audience.
- Encourage the scientists to actively ask the audience questions and seek their points of view.
- Don't give in to requests to show PowerPoint slides – encourage the scientists to express ideas in a more creative way.
- Don't make the science café too long; one hour to one and a half hours is usually adequate. Empower the moderator to finish early if the discussion is waning. It is better to finish early, with an audience wanting more, than for people to get restless and start leaving before the end.
- Encourage people to stay and continue the discussions around the tables and to chat to the scientists on a more informal basis.

Marketing

- Publish information about your event on websites. Send e-mail invitations. Put it in local calendars and events listings.
- Put posters up.
- Use social media to invite people to attend.
- Place flyers or business cards in cafés, libraries, culture venues etc. as well as on the tables at the science café.
- Collect the email addresses of people attending your science café and send details about the next event to them well in advance.