

Unit 1: Communicating as a Scientist

1.6 Learning Activities

Now that you have put your knowledge of understanding communication to the test, try your hand at these learning activities.

A1 — Make an inventory of the ways in which you communicate primarily with yourself about your work, through laboratory notebooks, graphs, mathematical or chemical formulas, a preliminary version (not shown to others) of documents or slides, and so on. Evaluate your satisfaction with this communication in terms of both quantity and quality. Specifically, evaluate its usefulness after a while — can you understand the notes or graphs you made months or years ago, and can you understand the reasons for making them? How can you improve the communication with yourself about your work?

A2 — Make a high-level inventory of the scientific communication for which you were part of the audience within the past six months or past year: the journals or magazines you read, the Web sites you consulted, the presentations you attended, and so on. For each item in this inventory, characterize yourself as an audience. Do you consider yourself specialized or less specialized in the topic or field discussed? Were you a primary reader or a secondary one? If possible, think of what a similar inventory would have looked like a few years ago. In what sense were you a different audience than you are now?

A3 — In the previous inventory or simply in recent months, think of all the communication instances that have frustrated or possibly offended you as an audience member. For each, try to identify the reason for your frustration. Was the content too complicated? (Did you perhaps feel excluded as a nonspecialist?) Was the structure confusing? Was the tone inappropriate?