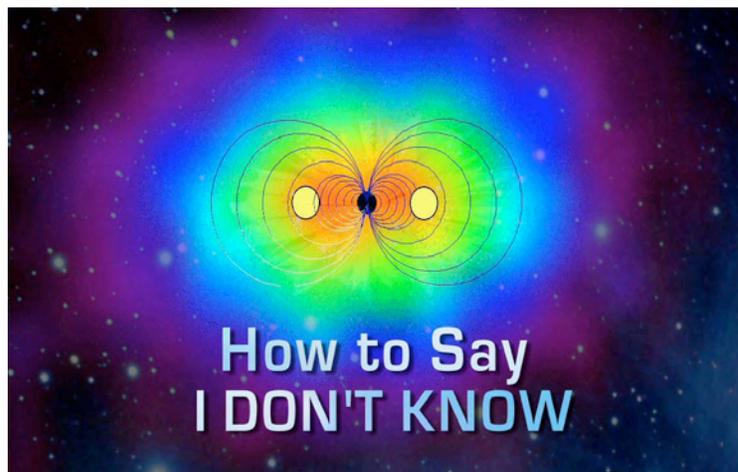


Sharing the Universe: Outreach Training Videos

Role Playing Exercise for



Produced by the
Astronomical Society of the Pacific
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Facilitating a Role-Playing Exercise

Topic: How to Say “I Don’t Know”

Role-playing exercises can be an excellent way for you and your club members to share effective ways to interact with the public in difficult situations. It can also be a way for your members to discover first-hand the rationale behind some of the questions people ask.

Preparation:

Before the exercise you will need to develop a list of scenarios. Plan to allow 3-5 minutes per scenario. The scenarios should start off easy and gradually become more difficult. Make sure your scenarios are clear and have focused objectives. Important tip: the more time you spend on the scenarios the smoother the exercise will go.

How to lead the Exercise:

1. Break the group into smaller groups of four
2. Explain the roles of the three characters – the amateur practices skills they would use, the public member should try to be as realistic as they can, the observers should watch the interaction to provide insight at the end of the exercise about what things were handled well and how things could have been handled better.
3. The facilitator should remind the group of the main points of the video:
 - a. Don't Panic
 - b. Don't Guess
 - c. Give related information
 - d. Suggest other resources
4. Instruct the groups to spend a total of 5 minutes on each scenario (3-4 minutes role playing, and 1-2 minutes for the observer to make positive comments). The facilitator should give the signal to move on to the next scenario at the end of each set of five minutes. The facilitator should also make sure that for each scenario the players switch roles. This allows each of the four members of the group to experience all sides of the situation as well as observe how their fellow club mates handle similar situations.
5. After each scenario the facilitator should gather the groups back together and have a follow-up discussion using the questions below. This discussion is a time for the observers to talk about what they saw that worked and what didn't work as well as get feedback from the other groups about different ways to handle the situation. The facilitator should stress that comments be positive in nature.
 - Joe/Jane Public: What struck you as the motives behind your questions? Were any of these motives surprising?
 - Observers: Were there any solutions that stood out to you as particularly effective?
 - Amateurs: Were there any scenarios that you found particularly difficult?
6. Repeat steps 4 and 5 until all the scenarios are finished.

A Sample Role Playing Session

Here are four sample scenarios for role-playing surrounding the topic of difficult questions. Please remember these are just possible scenarios. As the facilitator you should create scenarios that will be the most useful to your club.

You should allow about 10 minutes for each scenario – 5 minutes to act it out and 5 minutes for a group discussion.

1. The Inquisitive Question

Number of players: 4, 1 amateur, 1 public member, 2 observers

An amateur is showing a group of people Jupiter in his telescope. Suddenly Joe Public asks, “How do telescopes work?” How does the amateur reply?

2. The Distance Question

Number of players: 4, 1 amateur, 1 public member, 2 observers

An amateur is showing a group M51 the Whirlpool Galaxy. Jane Public asks, “How far away is it?” The amateur doesn’t know the distance in the exact number of light years. How does the amateur answer?

3. The Destruction Question

Number of players: 4, 1 amateur, 1 public members, 2 observers

An amateur is showing a group a supergiant star. The amateur says “one day this star will go supernova”. Joe Public asks, “Why do stars explode?” How does the amateur field the question?

4. The Technical Question

Number of players: 4, 1 amateur, 2 public members, 1 observers

An amateur is showing Cassiopeia A at a public star party. One of the guests says “Cassiopeia A? Have you had a chance to look at the quiescent spectra with the light-element neutron star atmosphere models? They clearly show what is in the middle of the remnants!” The amateur is at a loss. The questioner has obviously done a lot of reading about supernova remnants. How does the amateur respond?