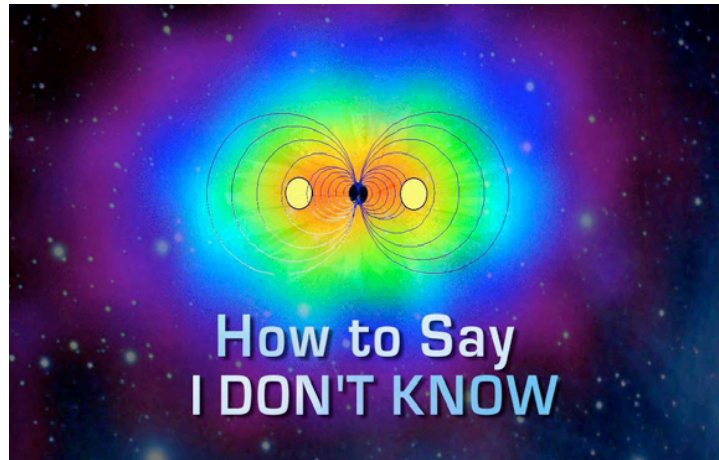


# Sharing the Universe: Outreach Training Videos

## Tips for



Produced by the  
Astronomical Society of the Pacific  
<http://www.astrosociety.org>

All *Sharing the Universe* Videos can be found at:  
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Sharing the Universe is based upon work supported by the Informal Education Division of the [National Science Foundation](http://www.nsf.org) (www.nsf.org) under Grant no. DRL-0638873. Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the National Science Foundation.

# Tips on How to Say “I Don’t Know”

## The Main Ideas:

1. If you don’t know the exact answer to a question, don’t panic and don’t make up an answer. It’s MUCH better to give no answer at all than an incorrect or made-up one.
2. If you can, give the visitor a more general answer related to the question OR ask them about their interest in the topic – get the visitor talking! OR provide the visitor with a way to find out the answer.
3. Remember: No one knows everything.

## 6 Ways to respond to a Question you don’t know the Answer to:

1. Ask the group: Repeat the question then throw it back to your audience: “Does anyone here have any experience with that?”
2. Defer: “Let me think about the best way to answer that. Come up after we’re done and I’ll be happy to talk to you.”
3. Find another expert: Someone else in your organization might be better equipped to answer. You can say, “I’m still learning about that myself. Maybe we can find out together. Let me introduce you to someone who might know that.”
4. Offer to do research: Keep cards or handouts with you. “I’d want to confirm some details before giving you an answer. Here’s my email. Send me your question and I’ll research it and get right back to you.” (It is unlikely they will send you the question.) You could take their email address, but then you have to take action. Besides, some people are very reluctant to hand out their contact information.
5. Start a discussion: You can also just start a conversation that can reveal more about their interests – and their own current understanding: “That *is* a fascinating topic. What prompted you to ask about that?”
6. Clarify what they’re asking about: Sometimes they might be using incorrect terms or language that is not very precise, leading you to misinterpret their question. Try: “I’m not sure I’ve heard about that but it sounds interesting. Tell me more about it.”

## Final Notes:

1. One main reason people will ask you questions at a star party is to get you to talk with them. Sometimes they don’t even care about getting an answer to the question they asked they just want to know more about what you do and about astronomy.
2. Each of us is at a different place in our level of astronomy and science knowledge. We are all learning more all the time; none of us was born knowing astronomy. Being a part of an astronomy club provides one of the best environments to learn more – you have mentors all around you.
3. A great way to learn more astronomy is to attend classes or lectures at your local community college.
4. As you learn, practice these techniques for helping visitors get their questions answered and use the opportunity of doing outreach to learn new things along with your visitors.