

“What Do You Do?” Host a forum where scientists and humanists explain each other’s research.

Audience for this recommendation:

Humanities and science researchers in the academy

WE1S’s study of the media shows that the humanities and sciences are talked about very differently in public discourse. For example, the media profiles the humanities for the public as “more academic” (see [KF-5-2](#) and [KF-5-7](#)). It also pays attention to specific research areas of science as distinct from each other but tends to lump the academic humanities together [see [KF-5-7](#)]. WE1S’s surveys of students and members of university communities corroborate such divergent perceptions of the humanities and sciences (see [KF-9-5](#)).

Try this:



→ **Host a forum for humanists and scientists to explain each other’s research to a mixed audience.**

The goal is to prompt experts in each domain first to understand *each other’s* research methods (along with their foundational knowledge and value concepts) and next to find common ground. The essential question one researcher has about the work of another (*What do you do?*) will thus evolve into a common question (*What do we do?*) bridging across disciplines and ultimately to broader areas of public concern.

→ **A specific agenda might be:**

Gather three interlocutors from different fields, for example:

- An astrophysicist
- A specialist in Old English manuscripts
- A science fiction writer

Ask interlocutors 1 and 2 to explain to the audience what each other does and why:

- For example, the astrophysicist must explain how the medievalist is working with a manuscript, and why the research task is significant. Reciprocally, the medievalist must explain how the astrophysicist is researching and theorizing the rate of expansion of the universe, and why that matters. The science fiction writer, meanwhile, will outline the plot for a novel (or film) set in the future in which the protagonist is both an astrophysicist and medievalist, bridging the two fields.

Finally, ask all three interlocutors to work together and with the audience to formulate ways of communicating the value of *both* scientific and humanistic research to the public. For example,

- What are the best three terms to use in describing research?
- What is the best single example of an issue related to both humanities and science research that affects the public?
- What is the best medium through which both humanities and science experts can reach the public?

Resources

* Research backing up this recommendation:

[KF-5-2](#), [KF-5-7](#), [KF-9-5](#)

* Related materials: [A-8-1](#), [WE1S Research Report](#)