



# A CUP OF SCIENCE, ANYONE?

**Science cafés are relaxed, social events where people talk about science in everyday language. People enjoy these lively dialogues and value the opportunity to get some answers directly from scientists. This exciting way of engaging people in science is very popular in the UK. The British Council is now expanding science cafés around the world, including in South Africa.**

## Science cafés ...

- are open to anyone, especially people with no science background;
- welcome invited guests and anyone else with the time to stop by;
- happen in coffee shops, restaurants, student cafeterias, staff canteens, bookshops, theatres, science centres, community centres, and even in bars, but preferably not in formal, academic settings.
- typically have between 10 and 60 guests;
- run for 60 - 90 minutes; any time of the day that best suit the audience;
- are free!  
(Guests pay for their own food and drink, unless you have a sponsor.)

## Planning a science café

You can organise and run a science café without a huge effort or budget.

You need:

- A fascinating, fun, controversial or cutting edge topic;
- A scientist (or small panel of scientists);
- A venue with good seating and sound equipment;
- Refreshments (sponsored or cash bar).

## The science café organiser must:

- Find a suitable venue;
- Find and prepare the participating scientist(s);
- Facilitate the event (or find a facilitator);
- Brief the scientist(s) thoroughly about the nature of the event;
- Take care of logistical details, like booking a venue and equipment;
- Market and promote the event via email, posters, and flyers, etcetera (a catchy title is important!);
- Visit the venue beforehand and check all the arrangements;
- Take care of sign-in sheets and evaluation forms;
- Keep the conversation lively, free-flowing, spontaneous and all-inclusive;
- Keep track of time and close the event by thanking the speaker;
- Evaluate the event to make improvements next time (ask audience for future ideas).

The British Council supports the development of science communication initiatives that help to break down the barriers between scientists and the public, and show that scientists are making an important contribution to the economic, political and social fabric of nations. Mechanisms such as science cafés allow the impact of science on people's lives to be examined and debated. They also communicate the excitement and importance of science, and so make science more attractive and appealing to young people thinking about future careers.

Find out more about the history and latest trends in science cafés, including science cafés at school and science cafés that link different countries through videoconferencing at <http://www.britishcouncil.org/science-society-cafesci.htm>

For more about the British Council visit [www.britishcouncil.org/africa](http://www.britishcouncil.org/africa)

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## For the scientists

- Tell the audience about your interest in the field and your passion for your research.
- Use plain, everyday language (get rid of jargon and acronyms as far as possible) and explain any technical terms you absolutely have to use.
- Avoid PowerPoint, unless you use it to show one or two images or a very short video clip.
- Be open and honest about scientific uncertainties or incomplete knowledge.
- Be yourself, and have fun!

## Benefits for the participating scientists

- An opportunity to gauge public opinion about your research and find out about public concerns and expectations in your field;
- A way to share your enthusiasm for science and practice your communication skills;
- A chance to stimulate dialogue and contribute towards public science engagement;

## The flow of a typical science café

- Welcome and introduction by facilitator
- Short introduction to the topic by the invited scientist(s)
- Audience questions; discussion & debate
- Closing

Research in the UK has shown that the majority of presenting scientists were very satisfied with the experience, found it personally fulfilling and wanted to do it again! About a third indicated that presenting at a science café changed how they think about talking to a general audience about their work.