

Why On-the-Spot Feedback Matters: The High-Level View for Scientists



On-the-Spot Feedback (OTSF) is an approach that gives science communicators tools to make audiences' thinking and feelings visible immediately during interaction and adjust their approach. This summary highlights key findings from the project evaluation to consider if OTSF is a good fit for upping your communication game – and which OTSF resources will enable you to dig in further.

Adding Value to Science Outreach

Scientists who were trained in the OTSF approach and tried layering it onto their existing outreach found three distinct ways that it added value to their efforts to engage the public with science.

1 Audiences become less of a “black box.”

Applying the OTSF approach generates useful and concrete information about what an audience is thinking, feeling, and/or understands in the moment.

2 Scientists see opportunities to improve.

With audience views revealed, scientists can see an immediate way to adjust their communication. In-the-moment feedback allows a scientist to be flexible and responsive – taking a step back, skipping ahead, or trying a new analogy.

3 Audiences stay engaged.

Although OTSF was designed for feedback, the tactics have the added benefit of being fun, active, and participatory – which prompts greater audience engagement and attention.

Related Resources



How did scientists describe the value and limitations of OTSF?

Evaluation Report: Page 9

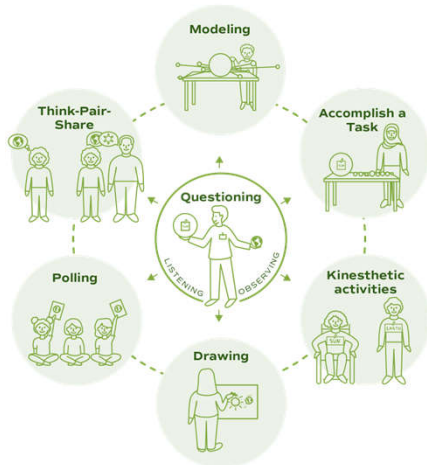


What's the difference between feedback & engagement?

OTSF Guide: Page 6

Using Familiar Tactics to Elicit Feedback

The OTSF Tactics



The OTSF approach focuses on learning seven core tactics, each of which can be used to elicit feedback.

“These tactics seem really familiar...”

Scientist-testers occasionally reported that these tactics were like things they already used in outreach. They already knew, for example, that asking audiences to accomplish a task was a great way of teaching a particular skill or to convey a concept.

That's true! These tactics are frequently used to create active, hands-on learning experiences.

The OTSF approach uses these tactics for a different end. Instead of designing a prompt to enable the audience to learn a particular idea, the prompts are carefully constructed so that **the communicator learns something about their audience** – what they know, feel, or think. By reframing the purpose of the tactic, an engaging activity can easily become a feedback tool that reveals what the audience is thinking or feeling.



Where are the core OTSF tactics described?

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Learning about Audiences

Scientists testing the OTSF approach applied the tactics to help them achieve a variety of feedback needs. They considered when they would most benefit from making their audiences' thinking visible – at the start, in the middle, and/or at the end – to help them improve.

Examples of What You Can Learn with OTSF



Incoming Knowledge

Does the audience already know the “basics” of your topic? What assumptions or misunderstandings do they bring?



Incoming Opinions or Feelings

How do people feel or think about a topic? What do they care about? What biases and priorities are relevant to them?



Incoming Interests

Which topics, perspectives, or implications would an audience be most intrigued to learn about? What questions do they have?



Mid-Point Understanding

Are they grasping core ideas you tried to communicate so far? What hasn't come through as well as you hoped?



Achievement of Your Communication Outcome

Where did the audience end up relative to your intended outcome (for their learning, feeling, thinking, attitudes)?



Which types of questions did scientist-testers use most often?

Evaluation Report: Page 37



Can I see examples of using OTSF to answer these questions?

Video 5: Paying Attention
Video 8: Large Audiences



Do audiences notice when scientists use OTSF?

Research Publication

Having a Plan while Being Flexible

The OTSF approach emphasizes planning. The system requires scientists to plan both the outreach *and* the feedback that is needed.

The last step may be the hardest: adjusting communication based on what you see and hear. Two approaches that worked for testers:

Planning Process



- Set outcomes for your outreach
- Decide what you want to learn about audience thoughts or feelings
- Plan when and how to elicit feedback to inform your communication

Plan for Flexibility



If improvising makes you nervous:

In advance, you can think through ways audiences might respond to a question or task. You can plan a few if-then pathways of how you will proceed based on what you see and hear from the audience.

Improvise



If you are ready to adapt on the fly:

When audiences say unexpected things, OTSF allows you to adapt in unplanned ways. If you're ready to think on your feet, you can make big or small changes that respond to your audience.



Where can I find planning templates?

OTSF Guide: Page 24



Where can I find examples of adapting on-the-spot?

Video 6: Self-Reflection
Video 7: Polling Example



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