

Reading Recommendations

Diane Scherzler

Everybody who wants to vividly talk to a general audience about his or her field of research needs a feel for the appropriate linguistic means. What you have to say is more than just advising some facts. It should really reach the reader, the viewer, and the listener, and should not be forgotten after some few seconds.

Communicating outside of the own discipline is something completely different than giving a lecture, writing an article for a peer-reviewed journal or composing a textbook. Expressing everything a bit simpler is far from being enough.

The books, I am recommending, are written for a general audience. The language is not a scientific one, but uses different means. You will get a feel for these means as well as ideas how you could communicate your research to non-experts.

For all subjects except your own field of expertise you can observe yourself in the role of a lay-person: What fascinates you? Is it a vivid comparison that you remember for a long time? Is it an amusing anecdote? How do you react when you do not understand a certain aspect? When do you feel bored? Learn by this experience.

Bill Bryson: A Short History of Nearly Everything (2003)

On more than 600 pages Bryson writes in his popular book about our planet, about life, and about the cosmos – about nearly everything. You will need a good memory for the many names of researchers, but Bryson narrates the stories about discoveries with much vividness so that they will stick in the reader's mind. Have you, e. g., ever imagined proteins as biochemistry's party animals who affiliate with different element groups and compounds according to their disposition?

Primo Levi: The Periodic Table (Original title: Il sistema periodico. 1975)

Italian writer and scientist Primo Levi (1919-1987) orientates his autobiography to the periodic table of chemical elements. The chronicle of a carbon atom, e. g., is wonderful to read.

Oliver Sacks: The Man Who Mistook His Wife For a Hat (1985)

Neurologist and psychiatrist Oliver Sacks narrates strange and sad stories as well as occurrences that make the reader laugh. Among Sacks' patients is, e. g., a professor of music who is no more able to identify faces. A young woman lost all perception of her own body. A drug addict is suddenly able to smell as differentiated as a dog. Sacks' writing is virtuoso; he lets the reader participate in discovering the unknown worlds of the human brain. Even if today's science knows more than in 1985, Sacks' observations have not lost actuality.

Dava Sobel: Longitude (1995)

Every navigator is able to determine the latitude of a ship by the time of day, by the position of the sun or of the luminaries. Who wants to know, however, a ship's exact position, also needs the longitude. It is calculated by two times – the one aboard the ship and another one at a place with known longitude. Today this is no problem at all, but for long times it was completely impossible. Science journalist Dava Sobel narrates of William Harrison, a researcher and clock maker, who solved in the 18th century one of history's major problems against all odds. Sobel looks after a not very obvious topic – precisely and full of linguistic elegance.

Alan Weisman: The World Without Us (2007)

Tomorrow you won't exist anymore. Neither will I exist; nobody of us will be here. It is not important why; this is not what Weisman thinks about. The repeatedly awarded US-American journalist paints in his book a picture of an Earth on which we are missing from now on. He asks: What will then happen to our cities? What will our cats, dogs and cattle do? What is the fate of our plastic waste? Is there a risk emanating from nuclear power plants, when nobody services them? Weisman talked with many experts for getting an estimation. „The World Without Us“ confronts the reader with a surprising scenario, but this is not the only reason why the book is exciting to read. Weisman's narrative style skilfully adapts to the different situations he describes.

Diane Scherzler M. A.
Orchideenweg 6
72762 Reutlingen
Germany
+49/(0) 71 21 / 27 45 41
mail@diane-scherzler.de