Have you ever tried to talk about your work to family or friends—only to get yawns? These are the same people taking time to watch one or more of the two million cat videos on the internet, right?

It’s truly aggravating, isn’t it?

Comparing the attention span for silly entertainment and that of an important scientific topic isn’t really fair. Watching cat videos doesn’t take much brain power, but listening about science does. I don’t think we’ll ever know why cat videos are so popular, but I do think scientists can come closer to competing with these pesky videos.

So, what can scientists and practitioners learn from the success of cat videos? Here are some tips:

1. Cat videos are short. They are just a few minutes. Do you have a simple, first sentence (your lead) that explains the importance of your work? Can you explain your research in 50 words or less? Three minutes? If not, try writing down some ideas. Create a compelling lead sentence with “Did you know?” or your analogy—see Tip 3 below.

2. Cat videos are simple. Make sure that your explanation doesn’t have any “jargon” in it—terms that scientists or technical professionals use but are not common for the general public. A few examples:
   a. Modeling—The general public thinks of folks in magazine pages and high-fashion runways. Even if you work in scientific modeling, we don’t recommend you use “modeling” as a verb. Say “my research is important to help predict X…” and leave out the term completely.
   b. Nutrient management—The general public thinks of nutrients as things that come in their food or supplements. Start with a question, like “Do you fertilize your lawn or garden?” And then say, “Well, that fertilizer has nitrogen in it, and I help growers determine the right amount to apply to grow sorghum.”
   c. Try typing any of the following into an online thesaurus and see if there are simpler words you might choose: modality, ameliorate, mitigate, aggregate, etc.

3. Cat videos are relatable. Do you have an analogy for your work? It really helps start the conversation at a shared value or understanding. Many of our member scientists have come up with excellent analogies for their research. Some examples:

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Tips to Improve Your Public Communications

by Susan Fisk

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