

PUBLIC UNDERSTANDING OF PLANETARY SCIENCE

12 March 2006
Lunar and Planetary Institute
Houston, Texas

A Few Tools for Assessing Audience Understanding

- Invite your audience to share what they know about the topic before you begin the discussion. Allow response time and prompt them with questions to explore their ideas further so that they articulate their thinking completely. Once you and they become aware of their private theories, you can work with them to correct misconceptions.
- Models are powerful learning tools. Invite your audience to express their ideas through drawings or physical models using every-day craft items. Have them verbally describe what is happening in the model. Again, you will have a better understanding of their private theories and can tackle misconceptions.
- Invite your audience to share their questions on the topic. This will provide you with insights into their understanding and they will have more buy-in to the discussion. Often building understanding from their questions results in covering the topic content you planned. Write the questions so that everyone can view them; revisit the questions at the close of the session.
- Survey your audience with multiple choice questions (examples in resources). This can be done before a session, or interactively during a presentation (provide multi-colored or labeled index cards and have the audience show the card that corresponds to the answer they think is correct).
- Check your own awareness of your audiences' understanding. Predict what they will know and compare it to what you learn from your interaction with the audience. This will help you prepare to build deeper understanding with future audiences.
- And finally, be familiar with what the research tells us about the public's understanding of science and misconceptions the public may hold. Explore the Resources" page.