

A passion for research communication

Instilling passion for research and publication through AuthorAID

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A strong mentor is important for any researcher, particularly when they are just starting out. Through the AuthorAID mentoring platform, I have been able to provide guidance and assistance to people around the globe. Recently, however, this has taken on a new dimension — designing and facilitating research communication workshops. My first opportunity came in December of 2011, when the Bangladesh Academy of Sciences (BAS) trusted me with designing and facilitating an AuthorAID workshop in research communication for 26 Bangladeshi scientists.

BAS invited me to take on this task following an INASP journal editors' workshop where I was invited to share my experiences with young scientists. I have worked as a researcher, an editor and a publisher, but training had never been one of my primary roles, so this was an exciting opportunity and one that did not disappoint. It was an excellent experience — I loved it! I loved it so much that within a few short months I applied for an AuthorAID workshop grant to run a similar workshop for the Bangladesh Association of Plant Taxonomists. My application was successful and, with that grant, I designed and facilitated a workshop to focus on helping young plant scientists write and publish their work. The workshop took place in February of 2013.

Not being a “trainer by training”, I always wondered if a two-day workshop could have any lasting impact on people's actions, particularly in research communication. To satisfy my curiosity, I asked the participants how many papers they had published following my first workshop. The result was very exciting! Prior to the workshop, the average publication rate was 1.1 papers per year. However, in one year following the workshop, this rose to 2.3. In other words, the yearly publication more than doubled and the percentage of articles published in international journals rose from 37% to 56%!

I just could not keep my excitement within me! I wrote a post for the AuthorAID blog and shared it with my fellow scientists. This circulation had an immediate effect. One of my academic friends at a public university in Bangladesh invited me to organise a similar workshop for young lecturers. I voluntarily designed and facilitated that event in April 2013 — my third workshop in 16 months!

Even though most of the participants are young and have limited experience in presenting or publishing papers, I always appreciate their understanding and outlook. I always try to make the workshops interactive, innovative and interesting. For example, in these workshops one may find

the participants engaged in a debate or making individual or group presentations using unusual tools or playing games to explain different research communication topics.

Whatever shape a workshop or their participation might take, at the end of the workshop each participant makes a few simple promises, in a personal letter, to use the knowledge gathered from the workshop. In several months' time, I send a reminder of their promises, which includes their own letters, back to the respective participants. While I have yet to get the chance, I am sure the look on some of their faces after opening the letter would be worth putting on YouTube!

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In my concluding remarks, I remind the participants to:

- be clear about their motivation for communication
- think about their audience
- know their subject matter by heart
- be confident as the author
- value the need for mentoring
- improve their language skills
- be passionate about their research and its communication

In my own opinion, passion can play an important role in driving researchers to not only conduct, but also to publish their work. However, I also realise that passion may not be the driving force for everyone — drivers like scholarships and promotion often win the battle. Because of the demand to publish, I have often seen young scientists getting confused, making compromises and even getting double-crossed. A strong feeling for, and understanding of, the research matter is extremely important to write a quality paper. Because of this, we, the experienced researchers, need to give those early in their career the opportunity and environment to realise this. We need to guide them how to put passion into their efforts.

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