

The passionate academic: why language is the key to connecting emotion and academia.

Dr Sunny Sanderson, *Queensland Museum, Australia*

Typhoid, dengue, fungus, fissures, and months of living way up river in a foreign land. Why? For the beauty of Science and the wonder and delight in methodically collecting empirical evidence to tell a story. Data can speak volumes, but the language used is the key to connecting emotion and academia.

Language is everything. Be it the language you speak, or the specific words you choose, these words matter. Knowing your audience and telling a story is how we make lasting connections. Be it as a researcher in the field, an academic before a lecture theatre, or with a 3-year-old child in *SparkLab*, it is essential to know who you are talking to, and adjust your language accordingly. What does this mean? It means we must be open and listen. Listen to their stories, find links, make connections, and then share your knowledge together. You must find your common ground.

However, just as academics rely on shared definitions and meanings in order to reduce misinterpretation. Science communicators must also ensure that a scientific baseline is upheld. Then use the science to tell the story, bring it into the 'everyday'. Just as you can paint by numbers, you can also use the empirical evidence to reveal a picture full of the beauty and wonder that is the world that surrounds us.