



CHELTENHAM
Festivals

Fame Lab
TALKING SCIENCE

FameLab[®] UK
Participant Guide
Summary Version



Welcome from FameLab and Cheltenham Festivals

Cheltenham Festivals is excited that you have decided to take part in FameLab UK. We see our role as providing a platform to encourage scientists including social scientists, technologists, engineers and mathematicians to find their voices to inspire and excite the public imagination. Using the insights drawn from our experience we aim to develop the next generation of science communicators in the UK.

With our successful track record in facilitating FameLab around the world, you can be confident that Cheltenham Festivals in collaboration with Hub Organisations, will deliver a world class competition. To ensure the quality of FameLab is consistent around the world, it is important to us that every applicant taking part in the competition feels included and benefits in some way from the entire experience.

This guide is designed to help you understand FameLab and what is expected as you begin this journey with us. The elements that are essential – quality, networking, training, the importance of follow-up, and the judging criteria of content, clarity and charisma.

Welcome to the FameLab family and we look forward to working with you.

Marieke Navin, Science Festival Head of Programming

Sarah Cooksley, Head of Learning and Participation

Khazana Rasool-McLaughlin, FameLab UK and International Manager



About FameLab

Aims and Objectives

The main aim of FameLab is to encourage scientists including social scientists, technologists, engineers and mathematicians to find their voices and inspire and excite the public imagination.

To achieve this aim FameLab has the objectives:

- Encourage and enable science-related researchers to communicate their work with the public in an engaging and exciting way.
- Create an active, international community of science-related researchers who are confident and skilled in communicating their research with the public.
- Facilitate an international network of trainers and institutions sharing resources, best practice and opportunities to support science communication.
- To find and support the next generation of Science Communicators and to be future Cheltenham Science Festival speakers.

FameLab also meets higher societal requirements to:

- Generate public science appreciation. Generate a wider audience that enjoys science and advocate science as a beneficial societal endeavour.
- Break down the perceived barriers between scientists and the public.
- Provide a recognised and highly sought after source of quality science presenters for media, schools and other science communication networks.

The 3 C's

The principles of good science communication through FameLab are encapsulated in the 3 C's of Content, Clarity and Charisma. It is essential that Masterclass trainers reinforce the 3 C's as part of their delivery.

Content

The content of the presentations MUST be scientifically accurate. If the topic chosen has controversy or uncertainty around it, then the presentation must acknowledge the opposing views. The scientific topic presented should be well chosen to suit the audience.

Clarity

Clarity is critical for effective science communication. The structure of the talk is important, as well as making sure the audience and judges can follow the talk and are left with an understanding of the scientific concept chosen.

Charisma

The audience and judges should be left inspired and enthused about science. The presenter must have that hard-to-describe but unmistakable quality of charisma. The winner will clearly be the one who makes the science easy to listen to, entertaining, exciting, who is not only able to communicate the science but who can share their passion for it.

Eligibility & Training

Cheltenham Festivals is working in partnership with Regional Organisations in individual regions in the UK called Hubs. Each Hub will have exclusive permission to run their own Regional FameLab competitions in partnership with Cheltenham Festivals under the following conditions:

Eligibility

FameLab is trying to find people who want to talk about their science, not the people who have already shifted into science communication or promotion as a full-time career.

FameLab is primarily a science communication and training competition, as there isn't anything else like it. We found there were other platforms for the arts and humanities and not so much for science, hence FameLab was created to fill this gap. We recently included social sciences as we've recognised that there can be some crossover into the more human elements of science. We want to stay connected to science or scientific in some way – so archaeology, psychology, anthropology, criminology (if concerned with the human brain, etc) are now also allowed.

- **We welcome:**
 - Lecturers in science including social sciences, technology, engineering, mathematics or subjects, including specialist science teachers with a science degree.
 - Researchers who use existing research or meta-studies – they don't have to be getting their hands dirty
 - People who apply science including social sciences, technology, engineering or mathematics – for example, patent clerks, statisticians, computer technicians, consultants to industry
- Postgraduate students of science including social sciences, technology, engineering or mathematics
- People who apply science including social sciences, technology, engineering or mathematics in the armed forces or government bodies
- People who apply science including social sciences, technology, engineering or mathematics in industry or business
- Where it meets the objective of an international partner, undergraduate students (over 18) who have conducted independent research in a stem or social sciences may participate.
- **Sorry we can't accept people who are:**
 - Press or PR officers, even for science-related organisations
 - Artists who work on science-related themes
 - Performers whose shows are about science or engineering
 - Science centre staff who work exclusively or mainly with the public
 - Journalists and broadcasters (as their main or only job)
 - Non-specialist school teachers

Please note the dates of all stages of the competition, if you successfully progress to the next round you will need to attend all required events.

FameLab Training

Applicants shall receive an online or live training in communicating science to a live audience before submitting a video entry or after applying. Process may vary depending on each Hub, please check with your FameLab Hub Organisation. This training for the participants may be overseen and delivered by an experienced trainer(s) with competency in communications skills training.

Winners from each region will attend a FameLab National Masterclass over two days in Cheltenham in May of each competition year. This training will be fully funded by Cheltenham Festival including the cost of travel and accommodation for each finalist.

How it works

The Rules

The rules of FameLab are few, but crucial and are the same no matter the stage of the competition.

Simply participants have 3-minutes to “wow” the judges and audience and leave them wanting more:

- They have three minutes to present any scientific (including social sciences), technology, engineering, mathematical or medical topic of their choice.
- They cannot use any notes, PowerPoint, other electronic presentation or audio recording.
- They can only use the props that they can carry onto stage themselves.
- They should prepare and present a different talk for each stage of the competition, to show range and knowledge of their topic.

It's always been the rule of FameLab that participants prepare a different talk for each stage of the

The National Masterclass will be delivered by an approved FameLab Masterclass trainer.

If for any reason the chosen Winner can't make the dates for both Masterclass and Final, the place will be offered to a runner up so that there is a finalist present.

Support Materials

We encourage participants to visit our [FameLab YouTube Channel](#) where you will find archive videos of past FameLab contestants. For updates and information be sure to bookmark the [Cheltenham Festivals website](#).

competition. This is so that they are able to show they can communicate their science in various ways. Participants can modify previous talks so it is not the exact same talk that others or a judging panel might have heard before. They may want to add more details or change metaphors or examples. Judges will need to use their discretion if a talk is different, it need not be a matter for strict enforcement or disqualification.

- Talks must be no longer than 3 minutes. Arrangements can be made for participants to see a timer countdown if this is helpful or do the usual ‘wave’ with 30 seconds remaining. The host will stop them if they go far beyond 3 minutes.
- Talks should be presented in one take and participants will not be able to restart unless in exceptional circumstances. Only if there are any technical issues (microphone doesn't work, etc) will they be allowed to restart their talk.

- Participants may present standing up or sitting down.
- Participants may wear whatever you like as sometimes attire can be a prop. You should however avoid branded clothing and clothes or accessories that may be distracting or create unwanted sound that may be picked up by the microphone.
- **Remember the 3 Cs: Content, Clarity and Charisma.**

Heats and Video Submission

After completing an online application to take part in FameLab, participants will be contacted directly by their Hub and invited to an initial online training and then asked to submit their video entry directly to their Regional Hub Organisations. The video submissions will act as your regional heats, Hub Organisations will advise all applicants how to submit their video.

Video submissions should include:

- Up to three minutes long (content will not be judged after this time limit)
- No editing or special effects
- No other people or excessive props
- No background music (unless this is what you are talking about)
- **Remember the 3 Cs – content, clarity and charisma.**

Recording quality will not be assessed but obviously the clearer it is the better it can be judged.

Props

Participants are allowed to use props in FameLab, however be mindful about the types of props used as they can either work for or against you, also keep in mind your safety and those around you. The rule of

thumb at FameLab, be sure you can safely bring your prop onto stage and take it off stage yourself.

In the past, some of the most impressive entrants have been the ones who could walk on with nothing and get across a difficult technical subject with nothing but their voice and some simple gestures. Remember that no PowerPoint presentations may be used, and writing or drawing on paper is discouraged.

You can find some top tips for your video submission in **Appendix 1: Technical Guidelines and Set-up Instructions.**

Regional Semi-Final / Final

Depending on the number of successful video submissions per region, Hub Organisations may choose to hold either semi-finals or just a final.

The following guidance would apply to either option:

- The details of the Regional Semi-Final / Final (date, time, location) will be decided and promoted by your Hub.
- The final will be in front of a live audience as a key part of FameLab in bringing science communicators together with the public.
- In the Regional Semi-Final / Final the contestants have to deliver a different three-minute presentation to the one in their video submission.
- The same rules about props and no power point apply.
- After the presentation, the judges will ask questions of each contestant. They may want to probe the content, testing whether a candidate really has a good understanding and can respond clearly to follow-on questions, or whether they are putting a topic in its true context.

- Other questions might relate to the participant themselves: how do they see science communication fitting into their career?
- While the judges deliberate, the audience may be entertained or asked to complete a survey.
- When the judges have returned, the judges will announce once winners and two runners up and some regions may even do an audience vote. The judges will also give positive feedback and words of encouragement to each contestant.

Please note you may be asked for photographs (or film footage) which will help with publicity later.

Prizes

Regional winners' prizes can vary per region; however, the ultimate prize is a place in the FameLab UK National Masterclass and the Final, hosted by Cheltenham Science Festival. This includes UK travel and accommodation in Cheltenham for both the Masterclass in May and to attend the Science Festival

The Final and Beyond

The National Final

This event will be fully funded, organised and managed by Cheltenham Festivals and will take place live at the Cheltenham Science Festival in June of each year.

The winner of the UK national final will go on to represent the UK at the FameLab International Final live online in November. Cheltenham Festivals will communicate directly with the National Winner in the lead up to the competition.

inclusive of a Science Festival experience package in June for each regional winner. The costs of these will be covered by Cheltenham Festivals.

All Regional winners are asked to complete UK Regional Winners' Form. This information will be used by Cheltenham Festivals to invite finalists to the National Masterclass and also to produce a programme which will be distributed at the National Final and will be shared with all finalists as a keepsake. It will include a bit about each winner: their name, region, likes, dislikes, what you are working on and your social media contacts.

Judging Panel

An expert balanced judging panel will ensure that all aspects of science communication are assessed. Each panel combines different areas of expertise, maximising not only the ability of the judges to weigh up different strengths and weaknesses, but also to give useful feedback even to candidates who don't get beyond the first round.

The winner, two runners up and an audience winner will receive a trophy and additionally the overall winner will also be awarded STEM related prizes.

International Masterclass and Final

The UK National winner will qualify for the International Masterclass hosted online by Cheltenham Festivals in the October of each year and entry to the International Final hosted online by Cheltenham Festivals in November. The winner of this final will be crowned the international winner and will be hosted at the Cheltenham Science Festival in the following June.

Timeline

The following is an outline guide for FameLab UK, from the start of the cycle to the live National Final in June ending with the online International Final in November. Be sure to visit your Hub and Cheltenham Festivals websites for specific dates.

Month	Tasks
October	<ul style="list-style-type: none">UK Applications open.
January	<ul style="list-style-type: none">UK Applications close.
January - February	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Hubs to liaise directly with regional applicants.Applicants attend online training.Applicants invited to submit video entry to Hubs.
February - March	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Successful applicants progress to next round.
March - April	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Hub Organisations host live Regional Finals.Deadline for Regional winner's info to be sent to Cheltenham Festivals.
May	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Regional winners to attend two-day National Masterclass live in Cheltenham.
June	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Regional winners to attend FameLab UK National Final at Cheltenham Science Festival.UK National Winner announced.
October	<ul style="list-style-type: none">UK National Winner to attend the online International Masterclass.
November	<ul style="list-style-type: none">UK National Winner to represent the UK at the online FameLab International Final.

SAVE THE DATES

The winner of each UK region will be invited to two live events in Cheltenham. These events will be fully funded, organised and managed by the FameLab Team at Cheltenham Festivals.

UK National Finalists Masterclass Weekend

2 – 3 May 2025

This exclusive two-day Masterclass training gives the Regional winners now National finalists a chance to bond and network together and helps create an atmosphere of trust that makes it easier to take risks. Breaking through personal boundaries is a vital part of becoming a more confident presenter. This shared experience encourages the finalists to form a network of mutual support and encourages future collaborations.

The National Masterclass will be a mixture of talks, exercises and activities (both group and individual) on communicating through different forms and media. Sessions may include preparing and delivering a live talk, interviewing and being interviewed, having "stage presence" and experience. Alongside this, there will be holistic advice and tips that will not only help them get ready for the live National final but also for the future.

UK National Final

Friday 6 June 2025

This live event will see all the National finalists come together again as they vie to be the best science communicator in the UK.

The finalists will perform, be judged and the winners announced live on the Cheltenham Science Festival stage, there will also be an audience vote. The winner of the UK National final will go on to represent the UK at the FameLab International Final live online in November.

The winner, two runners up and an audience winner will all receive a trophy. The overall winner will also be awarded STEM related prizes.

**To find out more about FameLab
contact your Regional Hub Organisation
or visit cheltenhamfestivals.org/famelab**

Technical Guidelines and Set-up Instructions

To help prepare participants to take part in an online version of the competition we have put together some technical guidance and set up instructions to help prepare online participants.

This is to check connection stability and speed; we recommend each participant do this test in the location they will be for any live online event. This information should help all online participants.

FameLab Online

Remember that the judges will be focusing on you and your presentation skills. The following are suggestions for you to help the judges see and hear you as clearly as possible, and to create a great event for audiences to enjoy.

Internet

We recommend a minimum of 5 Mbps download and 2 Mbps upload for a stable and consistent stream of video and audio. We will have to drop down to audio-only mode if connection is weak. If you can, try plugging in directly to your internet rather than connecting over Wi-Fi. [Please click here to test your connection stability and speed.](#)

If your results are below the minimum requirements stated above, please let your Hub Organisation know as soon as possible so that they can support you. Please keep in mind whether anyone else may be planning to use your internet at the same time as the live final. If possible, please ensure that only you and your device use the internet for the duration the live final.

Lighting

- All cameras capture the best quality video when there is a good light source.
- Extremes of light or dark make filming difficult, so avoid a location with very bright direct sunlight or a very dark area.
- Side or front lighting is best: if you are sitting on a clock looking towards 12 then the light should be between 10 and 2 for a neutral, well-lit look.
- Soft natural window light is ideal. If this is not possible, place a warm lamp in front of you in the position described above.

Sound

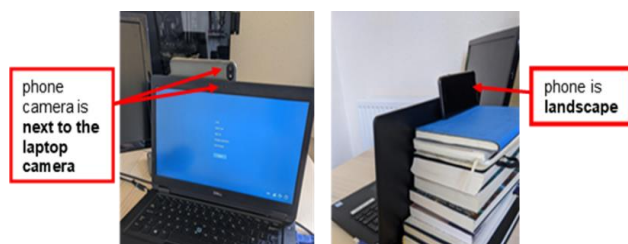
- Please record inside to help to avoid background noise being picked up through your microphone. Please minimise other sounds in the room as much as you can (turn off any machines or fans that may create excess white noise).
- We recommend using a USB microphone and headphones that will better minimise background noise. If you don't have access to a USB microphone, then a built-in microphone on a set of headphones will work fine.
- If you are not wearing headphones, please stay close to the camera/microphone for the best audio.

Camera tips

- Please use the best camera you have access to for the live final: you may use your phone, but keep in mind you would need to log onto the online platform from it.
- If using your phone, ensure that it:
 - is set it up in a stable position and landscape at all times
 - is fully charged
 - is in airplane mode with do not disturb switched on
- If you own a dedicated camera with mic and are confident to use this:
- The highest quality - 1080p will be ideal
- Avoid high frame rates, aim for 24fps, 25fps or 30fps (higher is not necessary and impacts the amount of light required).

Eye-line

- Whatever device you are using please make sure that the camera lens sits at or above eye level, no higher than your hairline.
- Once your camera is in place, remember not to sit too close to the camera. Position yourself far enough away to capture your shoulders and your entire face with some room to spare.
- Be careful to look directly at the camera filming you throughout (your phone camera for example). It is more important to have eye contact on your recording device than on the video call! We recommend placing a small, brightly coloured dot sticker directly above your camera lens to help draw your eye to the correct lens.
- It is a good idea to practise the set-up described above and test the recording on your phone and review what the recorded shot looks like.
- Here is a test set up example:



Background

- Avoid having bright windows or lamps in the background – lighting should come from in front of you.
- Please avoid messy or distracting backgrounds if possible. Aim for a simple clean background.
- Do not use a virtual background, or background animations, slides, graphics or green screen effects since these are not within the spirit and rules of FameLab.
- We will discuss backgrounds further in the masterclass, but in the meantime, have a look at other science communicators online and consider what you like about their backgrounds, setups, lighting etc. For example, a simple house plant or bookshelf gives the shot some depth and colour.

Top tips

We aim to keep to the structure of FameLab as closely as possible whether live or online.

- Your talk will need to be presented in one take – just as if you were on stage, you will not be able to restart unless in exceptional circumstances. Only if you have technical issues (your internet freezes or your camera falls, for example) will you be allowed to restart your talk.
- The usual rule of ‘no notes’ still stands. The judges will be able to tell if you are reading from notes or a script!
- Do not use background animations, slides, graphics or green screen effects since these are not within the spirit and rules of FameLab.
- Your talk must be no longer than 3 minutes. We can arrange for you to see a timer countdown on screen if this is helpful or do the usual ‘wave’ with 30 seconds remaining and a loud horn sound at 3 minutes, or if you would find this distracting you can choose not to see the timer. The host will stop you if you go far beyond 3 minutes.
- Any props you use must be able to carry yourself.
- You may participate standing up or sitting down.
- You can wear whatever you would usually wear to the stage version of FameLab. As you would for the stage version, please avoid branded clothing and clothes or accessories that may be distracting or create unwanted sound that may be picked up by the microphone.
- **ENSURE YOUR DEVICES ARE PLUGGED IN TO A POWER SUPPLY.**