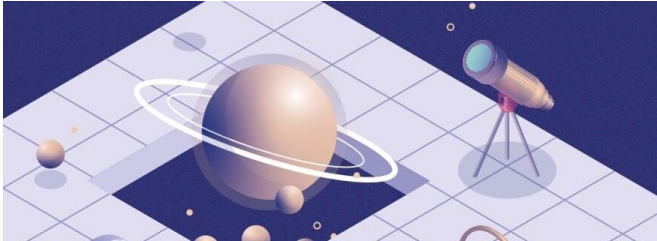


# The building blocks for astronomically literate citizens

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What does it mean for a citizen to be literate in astronomy? Astronomers who participate in outreach to the general public experience various degrees of astronomical knowledge among people. But so far, there had not been a systematic evaluation and definition of what astronomical literacy actually means. Astronomers including Pedro Russo from the Leiden Observatory therefore published the first global document that proposes a definition for astronomy literacy.

Throughout history, [astronomy](#) has revolutionised the way humankind sees its place in the universe, from knowing only a handful of planets in the solar system, to the billions of galaxies currently known. But to what extent has this knowledge been integrated into society? The International Astronomical Union (IAU) wanted to find a way to determine how astronomically literate the public is. But before it is possible to assess this, you need to determine what [literacy](#) means: What should citizens, anywhere on the planet, know about astronomy? For that reason on 3 May, they published the first global astronomy literacy [document](#), titled "Big Ideas in Astronomy: A Proposed Definition of Astronomy Literacy." Russo was one of the leaders of the project.

The document presents eleven big ideas in astronomy, such as "We are all made of stardust"

or "We may not be alone in the universe," each structured in seven to ten supporting concepts. The 65 pages cover a wide range of aspects of astronomy, from history to technology and from theory to observations. Also, the social and philosophical dimensions are covered, all anchored in topics that stretch from the Earth to the edge of the cosmos.

"Big Ideas in Astronomy aims to be both informative and inspiring, showing the importance of astronomy to the society we live in," says João Retrê from the Instituto de Astrofísica e Ciências do Espaço (IA). "It was designed to have a range of applications, such as aiding in the development of new resources for astronomy education, influencing school curricula, and providing a framework for governmental policy recommendations." The open-access document draws a roadmap to the astronomy literacy goals. It is intended for use by the astronomy education and outreach community, but also to evolve with their contributions. For this reason, the document is published under a Creative Commons license that allows anyone to share and adapt it, as long as appropriate credit is given.

**More information:** Read "Big Ideas in Astronomy: A Proposed Definition of Astronomy Literacy" at [www.iau.org/static/archives/ann...ts/pdf/ann19029a.pdf](http://www.iau.org/static/archives/ann...ts/pdf/ann19029a.pdf)

Provided by Leiden University

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