Scientific Background

• I study host responses and host responses to infectious disease

• I prefer to work with animals of agricultural interest

• Much of my research focuses on zoonotic pathogens
  – Pathogens that can jump from animals-to-humans
  – Pathogens that can jump from humans-to-animals
Communication Background

• Awarded the National Science Foundation CAREER award
  – One of the focuses was improving scientific communication to wider audiences
  – Initiated the 3-minute thesis
  – I would get my students to write 3 articles on the same topic to different audiences
    • Scientist
    • Politician: To lobby for a policy change
    • 5th graders
  – I would get the students to deliver 4 minute talks to different audiences

• In conjunction with my colleagues at UMassD: Developed a graduate course for science students on understanding and writing to discrete and distinct audiences.
COVID-19 Communication

• Each Spring, I teach a class in Ecology of Infectious Disease (EID)
  – Host / Pathogen / Environment and how these three factors result in disease
  – Always includes a salient pathogen (e.g., EEE, Swine Flu, etc)

  – In December, I saw reports coming out of China about a new viral pathogen
  – By January 6th, I knew this was going to be interesting and decided to incorporate the emerging outbreak into my curriculum
Students’ work

January 20th

January 30th

February 15th
February 26th
COVID-19 Communication

• By mid February I knew…..

• Started writing short posts online
  – Including a controversial “it’s time to prepare” post

• Most posts were running interference against bad online information

• Tips and tricks to stay safe.
  – I had the rules of safety from my training… very few others had those same skills
COVID-19 Communication

• I found the science, and the reporting of the science, was causing me whiplash
  – Race to publish – Scientific
  – Race to publish – Media

• I found it easier to work my way through the articles, listen to the subject matter experts on those articles (twitter is your friend), and then reframe the work in a format my mother could digest…
  That was my audience…. But even that was too deep for some people (Surprising)
COVID-19 Communication

• I conducted ~20 classroom zoom meetings (3rd grade – 10th grade)

These meetings led to:
• Parents asking me to talk to their work places/organizations
• Physicians asking me to talk to their departments

Then came the Government Agencies (CDC, Alaska, Maine, federal courts, Boston City) and finally businesses
COVID-19 Communication

There is now a group that call themselves WWED

What Would Erin Do

People are desperate for clear guidance and they seem to accept the guidance more when there is not a political tinge to the writing.