



The National Federation of Atheist, Humanist and
Secular Student Societies

How to Run a Reason Week

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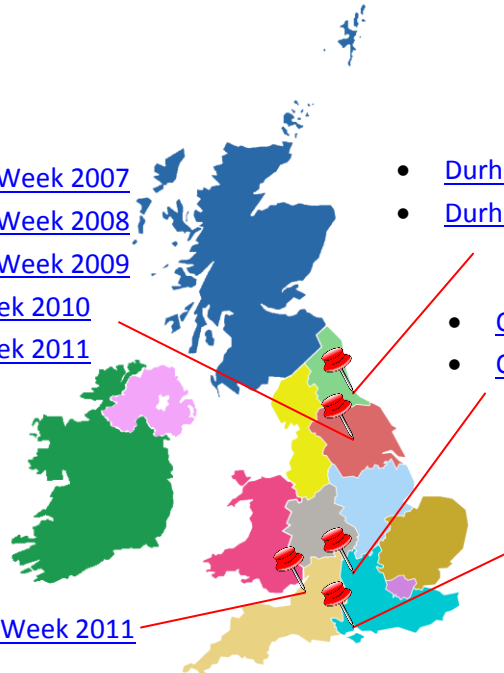


What is a Reason Week?

A **Reason Week** (also known as **Awareness Week**, **Rationalist Week**, **Think Week** or **Thought Week**) is an intense week of events which seeks to expose the type of discussion and debate that atheist, Humanist and secular student societies offer to a wider audience and raise the profile of the issues involved. They can serve to raise awareness of social, political and moral issues, recruit and retain members to the society, and generate publicity for the society or for their campaigns. The week-long events tend to involve a combination of lectures, debates, panel discussions, workshops, performances, and film showings. Events are usually free of charge, open to the public, and include catered elements. A bit like Christian Union Mission Weeks, only without the proselytising!

WHO HAS HELD A REASON WEEK?

A number of societies have held Reason Weeks:

- 
- [Leeds Rationalist Week 2007](#)
 - [Leeds Rationalist Week 2008](#)
 - [Leeds Rationalist Week 2009](#)
 - [Leeds Reason Week 2010](#)
 - [Leeds Reason Week 2011](#)
 - [Durham Reason Week 2009](#)
 - [Durham Reason Week 2011](#)
 - [Oxford Think Week 2010](#)
 - [Oxford Think Week 2011](#)
 - [Southampton Reason Week 2008](#)
 - [Southampton Reason Week 2009](#)
 - [Southampton Reason Week 2010](#)
 - [Bristol Thought Week 2011](#)

Leeds Atheist Society

Leeds Atheist Society has hosted a Reason Week in every year of its existence, reaching thousands of students. During the weeks a large marquee is erected in the centre of campus. For the past two years the marquee has been open 24/7 and much of the week was streamed live over the internet. During the day the marquee is set up café-style complete with daffodils and table service. This allows a relaxed, welcoming atmosphere for discussion. People can just pop in between lectures for a chat, enjoy the free refreshments and read our displays. At lunchtimes and in the evening the marquee is set up lecture style. Previous events have included karaoke, live bands and gambling! The most controversial of our events have been: a talk on how to have better sex, Stories for Stories where we offered to exchange religious texts for fairy tales, and our Flying Spaghetti Monster church service. Other highlights have been our annual debate with Christian Union, debates with Islamic societies, Make Your Own God out of craft material, and speaker Paula Kirby (of the Richard Dawkins Foundation).

– Nicola Young Jackson, Leeds Atheist Society



University of Southampton Atheist Society

Southampton University Atheist Society hosted our second Reason Week in November 2009. It was as promised a great week of films, talks and comedy. We held 9 events over 5 days. We kick-started the week with a lunchtime YouTube party showing our favourite atheist videos, followed by an evening of stand-up comedy. Tuesday began with the classic Dawkins documentary 'Nice Guys Finish First' followed by an evening talk by David Bothwell of South Hampshire Humanists

entitled 'What is Humanism?' Wednesday was our science day with a showing of 'The Irrational Health Service' and a talk from Dr Phil Utlely entitled 'Science - the Method, the Media and the Message'. Thursday saw the showing of Jonathan Miller's 'Brief History of Disbelief' and the final talk of the week by Prof Peter Atkins entitled 'The Conflict of Science and Religion' our best attended event of the week. To cap off the week's events we held a good old fashioned Pub Crawl ending at the Atheist Soc favourite, The Hobbit.

REASON WEEK

MONDAY 23RD NOVEMBER
COMEDY CLIPS
12:00 - 13:00, CLUBS & SOCS
COMEDY NIGHT
MICHAEL FABBRI
RICHARD RYECROFT + LUNG CATTISON + DON CROSS + PAUL JACKSON
18:30 - 22:30, NUFFIELD STUDIO CAFE BAR

TUESDAY 24TH NOVEMBER
FILM: NICE GUYS FINISH FIRST
13:00 - 13:50, NUFFIELD BUILDING, ROOM 1063
LECTURE: WHAT IS HUMANISM
DAVID BOTHWELL - SOUTH HAMPSHIRE HUMANISTS
19:30, NUFFIELD BUILDING, ROOM 1077

WEDNESDAY 25TH NOVEMBER
FILM: THE IRRATIONAL HEALTH SERVICE
14:00 - 14:50, NUFFIELD BUILDING, ROOM 1063
LECTURE: BAD SCIENCE
THE METHOD, THE MEDIA AND THE MESSAGE
DR PHIL UTLEY - SCHOOLS OF PHYSICS AND ASTRONOMY
19:30, NUFFIELD BUILDING, ROOM 1077

THURSDAY 26TH NOVEMBER
FILM: A BRIEF HISTORY OF DISBELIEF
13:00 - 14:00, NUFFIELD BUILDING, ROOM 1063
PETER ATKINS
LECTURE: THE CONFLICT OF
SCIENCE AND RELIGION
19:30, NUFFIELD BUILDING, ROOM 1077

FRIDAY 27TH NOVEMBER
PORTSWOOD PUBCRAWL
19:30, STARTING AT 51466

atheist society
University of Southampton

– Ray Thomas, University of Southampton Atheist Society

Oxford Atheists, Secularists and Humanists

Think Week 2010 was a joint venture between AHS members Oxford Atheist Society and Oxford Secular Society (now merged to form Oxford Atheists, Humanists and Secularists), and town societies Oxford Humanists, Oxford Sea of Faith and Oxford Skeptics in the Pub. There were 15 events across the 7 days in a variety of venues around Oxford, drawing an average attendance of over 40. Most events were speaker events, and speakers included Stephen Law, Peter Atkins, Paul Pettinger, Allan Hayes, Andrew Copson, Marayam Namazie, Julian Baggini, Samantha Stein, Ken Smith and Evan Harris. Cultural events included comedian Iszi Lawrence, a poetry workshop and a performance by the BHA Choir. The aim of this thought provoking week was to expose the type of discussion and debate that the 5 societies offer to the wider Oxford community of Oxford city, Oxford University and Oxford Brookes University.

– Richy Thompson, Oxford Atheists, Secularists and Humanists



Why hold a Reason Week?

AHS Reason Weeks serve the following functions:

- They raise awareness of numerous social, political and moral issues
- They can recruit members to the society
- They can be educational
- They can be used to gain publicity for the society or for issues and campaigns
- They can provoke a reaction on campus and in other student societies
- They can retain members by involving and entertaining them

But most of all... they're great fun!

Planning the Week - Initial Decisions

A number of decisions need to be made immediately.

WHO'S HOLDING THE WEEK?

You, obviously! But just your society, or other societies too? For Think Week 2010, Oxford Atheists brought in four other societies! These were the University-based Secular Society and three town groups - the Humanists, the Sea of Faith and the Skeptics in the Pub. These societies contributed valuable experience, time and resources to the events.

WHEN'S IT GOING TO BE?

Take into account the weather, exams and deadlines, holidays, speaker availability, and planning time needed. We would recommend giving 3-4 months to plan the whole thing, and ensure speakers aren't already booked when you come to invite them.

WHAT'S THE NAME, AND THE MESSAGE?

In the past, the AHS encouraged all societies to use the name “Awareness Week”, however weeks have been called “Reason Week”, “Rationalist Week” and “Think Week”.



Think Week was billed as “intended to make people think about things they probably haven't thought about before” – hence the name. Each of the five week days had a specific theme that it was built around – “Think About Belief”, “Think About the Universe”, “Think About Politics”, “Think About

Freedom” and “Think About Culture”.

HOW MANY EVENTS WILL THERE BE? WHICH TYPES?

Will events be group-led or speaker-based? Oxford Think Week was almost entirely the latter, though other societies have gone for a mixture of guest speakers, student speakers/debates, film showings and other student-run events.

Southampton's last Reason Week saw 9 events, running from Monday to Friday. Oxford Think Week 2010 featured 15 events over seven days (roughly two a day), with one at lunch time and another in the evening. Leeds' 2009 Reason Week featured 42 events over seven days, with events running 24 hours a day!

WHAT VENUES ARE AVAILABLE?

Can you book lecture theatres in your University for free/cheap? Or, like Leeds, would you prefer to erect a marquee on campus, so you can hold events 12 hours straight in one venue every single day?

WHAT'S THE BUDGET? HOW WILL YOU FUND THE WEEK?

Think Week 2010 cost just over £1000. Leeds Rationalist Week 2009 cost about £3000. Half of Think Week's budget went on publicity, but Leeds spent nothing on this, with the costs instead coming from equipment hire/purchase. Leeds have to fundraise all year round for their week.

WHO'S GOING TO ORGANISE THE WEEK?

You may want to set up a special committee to plan the event, as Oxford did for Think Week – the committee was made up of members of four of the five societies involved in the week. Leeds and Oxford typically hold 2 hours of committee meetings every week for months before their events, to plan every last detail.

Top Tip - Collaborative Planning Document

As well as having regular, minuted meetings and frequent email communication, Oxford Atheists, Secularists and Humanists have a collaborative planning document hosted on Google Docs, where an overall plan for the week can be stored, who's in charge of inviting each speaker recorded, etc. This is then maintained by the whole committee. Oxford also have a Google Spreadsheet, for detailing the budget.

The Budget

RAISING FUNDS

Raising money for a Reason Week can take a long time! Oxford are very fortunate with their weeks in that their membership fees generate enough revenue to pay for an expensive week, however Leeds have to spend all year fundraising for theirs.

Sources of funding you could consider include:

Asking for donations from members, former members and staff

Seeing if the University or Students' Union has special grants that can be given to societies organising large events. For example, Bristol got £450 from the University's alumni fund to go towards their 2011 week!

Asking for donations from supportive organisations and prominent individuals.

Seeking funds from local groups, like the local Humanist group – or, if you're organising the week with other groups, simply getting them to chip in too.

Asking for donations at the events, and advertising membership to your society.

Sell sponsorship or advertising to local business, such as on the side on your marquee or on hoodies.

Old fashioned fundraising! Hold sponsored silences, waxing or hair dying, cake stalls and jumble sales.....

If you decide to create specially branded hoodies for the week (as Leeds and Oxford have done in the past), then you could simply get people to pay for their own hoodie.

SPENDING FUNDS

What would you need to spend the money on?

Venues – if you decide to hold the event in a marquee, then hiring the venue could be the main cost of the week. Leeds spend thousands of pounds hiring a marquee and equipment each year!

Equipment – you may want to rent/buy microphones, speakers, lighting... kettles and urns!!!

Refreshments – tea, coffee, biscuits, other food and drink...

Speaker-related costs – transport, meals (if you take them out to dinner beforehand!), hotel (if you offer to put them up for the night)

Publicity – glossy posters, flyers, leaflets, ads in local/student Newspapers, Facebook advertising... For Think Week 2010, Oxford got 100 A5 posters, 200 A4 posters and 1000 postcard-sized leaflets, at a cost of almost £400 – but then got them all over the place...

Choosing Venues

LOCATION IS KEY

It's really important to hold your events in prominent locations. If you're using lecture theatres, try and use as few as possible, and make them central. If you're in a marquee, try and getpick a patch of grass that students regularly pass by.

Other things to consider

Cost of venues – many universities provide cheap or free lecture theatres, meeting rooms and grassy areas.

Size of venues – try and gauge the attendance of each event ahead of time (difficult, we know!). You need to ensure the venues have sufficient capacity, but too many empty seats make your events look unpopular.

Logistics – will your venue have electricity, water, and nearby toilets? What about wheelchair access? Where can you store equipment and refreshments?

MARQUEES

Using a marquee, generators and lights is very expensive, but has the advantage that your society can establish a permanent central location for all the events, which can run all day and night undisturbed. The space can become a social one, where people can just pop in for a chat, a coffee or simply to hang out. The main logistical problem from a marquee is keeping the expensive equipment secure. On two of their four years Leeds have chosen to rent a van, and on the other two years they have kept people in the tent 24/7.

Marquees are quite drafty so this means your week must be held at a warmer time of year. It is important to think about heating.

You can make the marquee look welcoming by placing friendly signs on the outside inviting people in and explaining when events are.

The Events

SPEAKER EVENTS

The highlight of many Reason Weeks is the speaker events. These could be student speakers, or they could be famous guests.

The [AHS Speakers Directory](#), which all AHS members should have access to, has speakers that are happy to be invited by AHS member societies, and are filterable by location and subject. Additionally, you could consider getting in

touch with the [British Humanist Association](#), [National Secular Society](#), [Humanist Society of Scotland](#) and [Humanist Association of Ireland](#) for further speaker advice (or to invite representatives from the organisations themselves!)

Top Tip - Help from the BHA

The British Humanist Association can provide speakers and panellists from within its organisation, as well as making select approaches to their Distinguished Supporters. Simply get in touch with [Bob Churchill](#).

Beyond that, sourcing speakers is simply a matter of searching them out, and getting in touch! Make sure you do so with plenty of time though – bigger names tend to get booked up long in advance.

Sample letter

Invitation to participate in Oxford Think Week

Dear Professor Atkins,

Allow me (re)introduce myself. My name is Richy Thompson, a fourth-year Oxford student, founder and ex-President of the Oxford Atheist Society and current south-east regional development officer for the National Federation of Atheist, Humanist and Secular Student Societies (AHS). I was in charge of the OAS when you came to speak, so we've been in contact before. I'm also now the coordinator of a committee recently formed for organising Think Week, a series of events that will be occurring in Oxford from 22nd to the 28th February. The aim of the week will be to expose the type of discussion and debate that the various non-theistic societies in Oxford offer to a wider audience and hence raise the profile of the issues involved. This sets it apart from the annual Oxford Intercollegiate CU week, which is explicitly a conversion event, and we won't be covering base questions like "Does God exist?" but instead be providing events in a similar vein to those we provide during the rest of the year. The events will be intended to make people think about things they probably haven't thought about before.

The week is a joint venture between the Oxford Atheist Society, Oxford Secular Society, Oxford Humanists, Oxford Sea of Faith and Oxford Skeptics in the Pub, the first two of these being University societies, and the last three being town societies. Other speakers we have during the week include Stephen Law, Julian Baggini, Andrew Copson, Maryam Namazie and Evan Harris - you can see more details on the website: <http://www.thinkweek.co.uk/>

We would like to invite you to speak on the evening of Tuesday 23rd. Most evening events are taking place between 8 pm and 10 pm, but this can be moved earlier if you like. Please feel free to make suggestions as to what you want to talk about, though if you would like to give a similarly-themed speech to the one you did for Oxford Atheists ("On the Importance of Science") then this would fit in very well. As with Oxford Atheists, we will happily cover any transport costs, and the cost of a meal with the committee before the event.

Would you require a projector for this event? We are considering recording the event - would this be okay with you? And do you mind there being a photographer there?

*I hope you find what we're trying to do here exciting, we're all pretty excited at the moment :)
Look forward to hearing back from you,*

Richy Thompson



OTHER SOCIETIES

One popular idea is to hold events from other societies. You could hold events with LGBT groups, feminist groups, the Comedy Society, the Philosophy Society, Science clubs, Debating societies, the poetry group, political societies...

You could also hold a debate with a religious society – for example, Leeds Atheist Society have an annual debate with Leeds Christian Union during their Reason Weeks.

Top Tip – Get them to promote it!

You could get any guest speakers, societies you are holding events with – or for that matter, any other society on campus you think would be interested – to promote your events.

OTHER EVENT IDEAS

Other ideas for events you can run as part of a Reason Week include:

Launch night – Hold a party the night before your Reason Week to get everyone excited.

Ask an atheist – a question and answer session with a panel of atheists.

Testimonies – Members tell the story of how they became an atheist/Humanist/secularist/agnostic/skeptic, or why they believe what they believe. It is best to get people with a mix of backgrounds to talk.

Get creative – Arts and crafts e.g. “Make your own God” events, or perhaps some cool scientific experiments!

Talks and debates – The AHS [talks](#) and [debates](#) directories should help.

Film showings – Show a popular film. The AHS [film directory](#) has suggestions.

Socials – Pubs, clubs, games such as football, rounders or, as Leeds, have done, poker and karaoke.

Comedy night –Get local comedians in to perform, as Southampton have done.

Cultural events – Hold a poetry session, like Oxford, stage a play (like Oxford almost did!), or even have an arts exhibition!

BHA Choir – The [BHA Choir](#) performed during Oxford Think Week and were great! If you're in London or the south-east, you could consider inviting them.

TIMETABLING

It's up to you how many events you hold! 5 events – one each weekday evening – is plenty, but some societies like to go all out, for example Leeds, who in 2009 held 42 events over 7 days!

Consider whether you could build a theme around each day, as Oxford did for Think Week. Try to avoid meal times – unless you provide food, or encourage people to bring their own!

If you're inviting lots of speakers, finding days and times that will work for them can be tricky. Try and invite them as far ahead of time as possible.

Try and vary the events to keep them interesting, and keep attendance high!



Publicity

The sooner you get the timetable finished, the sooner you can start promoting. It's important to promote as widely as possible!

ON CAMPUS

Print posters, leaflets, etc. For Oxford Think Week, posters went up in every college, shop and pub that would take one. A stall was held on the high street two days before the start of the event, at which literature was handed out.

Literature for the week (as well as each member society) continued to be handed out at the events themselves, as well as at society events in the run-up to the week.



Contact the local and student press, and the local and student radio and TV – hopefully they'll be willing to give you lots of free publicity! You could also consider advertising with them.

Contact other societies you think may be interested, to get them to promote the event to their members.

Produce hoodies or t-shirts specifically for the event – this is a good visible way to promote the event around campus, as well as during the week itself. See if you can get the event's logo on Big Questions!

ONLINE

If you have time and the know-how, consider building a dedicated website.

Create a Facebook event for the week, and invite all your friends! See if you can hit 200 attendees!

Consider paying for Facebook to advertise the event. This is fairly inexpensive, and can be targeted to e.g. everyone who put their religion as Atheist, Agnostic or Humanist at your University.

Contact your Student Union as they be able to get your event advertised on their website, on Union TV screens, and may even email the committee of other societies for you.

Get the AHS, [British Humanist Association](#), [National Secular Society](#), [Humanist Society of Scotland](#), [Humanist Association of Ireland](#), [Richard Dawkins Foundation for Reason and Science](#) and the [Pod Delusion](#) to promote the event. The BHA might be willing to send details to all their local members, if you ask them nicely 😊

Top Tip - BHA advertisement

The BHA offer advertisement online, in the Jan/Feb members' newsletter, in the BHA e-bulletin, and a targeted email to people in the local area. Contact [Bob Churchill](#) for more information.

Contact bloggers about the event! For Oxford Think Week, the organisers

found some, for example [Young Freethought](#) and [HumanistLife](#), were happy for us to write guest posts. Others, like the [Friendly Atheist](#) and [Not-Quite-So-Friendly Humanist](#) wrote their own posts.

DURING THE WEEK ITSELF

Continue to hand out leaflets for the events themselves, as well as updating the website and Facebook with summaries of the events and lots of photos.

THINK WEEK
- 6th Week Hilary - 22nd to 28th Feb 2010

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About

Think Week, a series of high profile (free!) events organised jointly by the Oxford Atheist Society, Oxford Secular Society, Oxford Humanists, Oxford Sea of Faith and Oxford Skeptics in the Pub. The aim of the week will be to expose the type of discussion and debate that these societies offer to a wider audience and raise the profile of the issues involved, among the whole Oxford community - Oxford city, Oxford University and Oxford Brookes. We won't be covering basic questions like "Does God exist?" but instead be providing events in a similar vein to those our various societies provide during the rest of the year. The events will be intended to make people think about things they probably haven't thought about before.

Refreshments will be provided at all events. Attendees are welcome to bring food to lunch time events.

Change of venue: The venue for Stephen Law's talk on Tuesday at 1 pm will be in Wadham College's Moser Theatre, not Lincoln College's Lower Lecture Theatre, as previously advertised.

Event confirmed: Think Week will feature stand-up comic Izzi Laurence in Bar Copa on George Street at 9.30 pm on Friday the 26th.

Events

For full details of all events, see the [Events page](#).

Monday 22nd - Think About Belief

20:00 **Committee Panel - "What are Atheism, Secularism, Humanism, Skepticism and the Sea of Faith?"**
- Lincoln College, Queensfort Room, OX1 3DR (directions)

21:00 **Interfaith/Interthought Panel - "Can Different Faiths and Worldviews Work Together for a Common Good?"**
- Lincoln College, Queensfort Room, OX1 3DR (directions)

Tuesday 23rd - Think About the Universe

13:00 **Dr Stephen Law - "What's It All About Then? Life, the Universe, and Everything"**

Top Tip - Record things!

If you want to leave a real legacy, record the events! (with speaker permission of course...)

Photos and audio from the majority of Think Week events can still be seen and heard [on the website](#).

Logistics

THE ROTA

You need to make sure each event has sufficient staff, so consider using a [Doodle](#) to find out staff availability. Draw up a timetable based on the results.

Top Tip - Advertise for staff

If you don't have enough staff, consider advertising for volunteers from your membership. This could also serve to identify future committee members!

Appoint different staff to different roles – have someone in charge of logistics, have two people in charge of ferrying people to the venue, have someone looking after and introducing the speaker, have two people in charge of food and drinks, have someone recording the event, and taking notes on it (if you want to write it up afterwards!) Designate a photographer – you could also advertise for good photographers, if the society itself is lacking. Make sure you have some slack, in case someone is ill.

ALSO...

Consider health and safety – speak to your University/SU, and fill in any paperwork they require. If required, make sure you have done a risk assessment that has been accepted by your SU.

Make sure you have somewhere safe and dry to store the food, drink, leaflets and equipment – lugging stuff about is one of the biggest challenges of the week!

Consider if there are adequate facilities for the preparation of food and drink – you may want to buy some kettles and urns, for example.

If you are considering offering more than drinks and biscuits, your Student Union may require at least one of your members to have an in-date Food Hygiene certificate. It is worth checking into this in advance!

Equipment you might need includes... chairs, tables, flooring, accessories to make the place look pretty and inviting, microphones, amps, speakers, projectors, lights, heaters, kettle, toaster, hot water urn, kitchen paraphernalia (bottle opener, can opener), cups, cutlery, plates, craft supplies, scissors, tape, a smoke machine, fire extinguishers, wire guards, steps, mats, cleaning gear, kitchen towels, recording equipment.....

And finally...

1. Be ambitious! The more ambitious, the better.
2. Things will go wrong! Try not to panic, you can always come up with a plan B.
3. Good luck! It's a lot of work to organise one of these! But the week itself will be a LOT of fun.

Good luck and have fun!

Written by Richy Thompson

with contributions from Nicola Young Jackson

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