

Tributes pour in for Stephen Hawking, the famous theoretical physicist who died at age 76

Written by Alan Duffy, Associate Professor and Research Fellow, Swinburne University of Technology

Acclaimed British theoretical physicist, cosmologist and author Stephen Hawking has died aged 76. Hawking is best known for his work on black holes, which revolutionised our understanding of the universe.

Hawking passed away today peacefully at his home in Cambridge, his family confirmed in a [statement](#)

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We are deeply saddened that our beloved father passed away today. He was a great scientist and an extraordinary man whose work and legacy will live on for many years.

His courage and persistence with his brilliance and humour inspired people across the world. He once said, "It would not be much of a universe if it wasn't home to the people you love." We will miss him forever.

Read more: [***A timeline of Stephen Hawking's remarkable life***](#)

Hawking was born on January 8, 1942, in Oxford, England. In 1963 he was diagnosed with ALS, a form of Motor Neurone Disease, and later confined to a wheelchair and forced to communicate via a computerised voice. But he continued his theoretical work and was outspoken on many things over much of his life.

Tributes have been pouring in on social media for the scientist, who made complex science accessible to everyone in his 1988 bestselling book [A Brief History of Time](#) .

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Among those early to pay tribute were the American astrophysicist Neil deGrasse Tyson and NASA.

Others to pay tribute include Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella and the Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi.

Hawking's acclaimed book, A Brief History of Time, was [made into a documentary](#) in 1991, directed by Errol Morris, who also paid tribute.

Australian reaction

There have been reactions too from the world of Astronomy in Australia.

[Alan Duffy](#), Associate Professor and Research Fellow, Swinburne University of Technology

Professor Stephen Hawking was an inspiration to me to become not just a scientist but a communicator of that science.

His work as a cosmologist, and discoveries in black hole physics were legendary. His best-known prediction, named by the community as Hawking Radiation, transformed black holes from inescapable gravitational prisons into objects that instead shrink and fade away over time.

His writings were inspirational to many scientists and enriched the lives of millions with the latest science and cosmic perspectives. He was also wonderfully funny with a fantastic media savviness that propelled him into A-list celebrity stardom as few other scientists before.

Through it all, of course, his illness made his achievements near-superhuman. How he manipulated Einstein's equations in his mind when he could no longer hold a pen I can't even begin to imagine.

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While his many contributions will live on there is no doubt that science and the wider world is the poorer for his passing.

[Jonti Horner](#), Professor (Astrophysics), University of Southern Queensland

I think Stephen Hawking's biggest achievement was getting people talking and interested in some very complex and challenging ideas about the universe and our place in it.

I remember the fuss when his book *A Brief History of Time* came out, and how it became such a big deal in the UK. It was amazing how widely read and discussed it was, particularly given its content (stuff that is usually portrayed as being really difficult and/or boring).

It was a fantastic example of how even the most complex and challenging ideas can capture the imagination, when they're explained in the right way. Above and beyond the great research he did, his impact as a communicator was fantastic.

He definitely did a lot to bring those kind of concepts into the mainstream, and doubtless inspired a whole new generation of cosmologists and astronomers. That is probably the best legacy any scientist could ask for!

[Lisa Harvey-Smith](#), Group Leader - Australia Telescope National Facility Science, CSIRO

Stephen Hawking was undoubtedly an intellectual giant, making leaps of reasoning that sometimes led to startling insights into the nature of the physical world. His finding that black holes slowly dissolve will probably be his greatest scientific legacy.

But he was much more than a skilled cosmologist. His greatest impact came from taking the time to carefully explain his theories to the public, engaging millions with his bestselling books.

As a 15-year-old, his most successful book A Brief History of Time had me captivated with relativity and quantum theory. This is the true strength of his legacy.

[Matthew Bailes](#) , ARC Laureate Fellow, Swinburne University of Technology, Swinburne University of Technology, and Director of the ARC Centre of Excellence for Gravitational Wave Discovery (OzGrav)

Like many of the great theorists, Stephen Hawking had the ability to use very simple thought experiments to make predictions about the behaviour of the universe.

My favourite was his insight into evaporating black holes, which combined general relativity and quantum mechanics.

His ability to remain engaged with the scientific community despite his physical condition was a testament to his rare talent.

Hawking also recognised the enormous potential of the universe to be teeming with life and the advances in technology that might permit its detection in the near future. Hence his support for Breakthrough Listen, the search for alien life in the Universe.

[Steven Tingay](#) , John Curtin Distinguished Professor (Radio Astronomy), Curtin University

As an astrophysicist who has spent a significant fraction of my career working on the observational aspects of black holes using radio telescopes, and hoping to continue that with the billion dollar Square Kilometre Array over the next decade, Stephen Hawking's work to understand the physics of black holes is close to my heart.

His mathematical and physical insights into black holes have been astonishing, which at some

level synthesised general relativity and quantum mechanics.

Hawking's work has inspired deep questions in physics and astrophysics, which has had a bearing on plans to build telescopes to explore the Universe, including the Square Kilometre Array in Australia.

[Alice Gorman](#) , Senior Lecturer in archaeology and space studies, Flinders University

There are few scientists who reach as far into popular culture as Stephen Hawking did. His research tackled the biggest of big questions – the nature of time, space and the universe we live in.

Sometimes it feels like science is losing ground in the modern world, but people still look to the stars for answers about who we are and how we come to be here.

Hawking's bestselling *A Brief History of Time* made cosmology accessible to people and brought black holes out of the shadows and into the public imagination.

Personally I'll miss his appearances on [The Big Bang Theory](#) , where he could out-nerd the nerds, and also provide some often necessary common sense. It was always great to see a world-class scientist just having fun.

Alice Gorman is a Co-Deputy Chair of the Board of the Space Industry Association of Australia.

Matthew Bailes receives funding from the Australian Research Council to perform fundamental science and is the Director of the ARC Centre of Excellence for Gravitational Wave Discovery (OzGrav). One of OzGrav's aims is to promote the benefits of fundamental science and use the allure of black holes and relativity to attract young people to careers in STEM, and educate the general public.

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Steven Tingay receives funding from Curtin University, Western Australian Government, Australian Government, US Government. He is a member of the ALP.

Alan Duffy, Jonti Horner, and Lisa Harvey-Smith do not work for, consult, own shares in or receive funding from any company or organization that would benefit from this article, and has disclosed no relevant affiliations beyond their academic appointment.

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