

Prof. P. James E. Peebles, Princeton University



Wikipedia

1. How did you become a scientist and what were the important moments in the course of your career? Did you plan it or was it more due to coincidences?

I enrolled in engineering at the University of Manitoba in Canada, but found the courses that most interested me were on physics. So I transferred to physics. I enjoyed working with fellow students in engineering, but found that the students in physics were more like me. I remember with pleasure many hours of arguments about physics and mathematics; many card games; and all those courses, problem assignments and preparations for exams.

One of the professors at the University of Manitoba, Ken Standing, had been a graduate student at Princeton University, in nuclear physics. He decided I should go there. At Princeton I attended meetings of Professor Robert Henry Dicke's gravity research group. I was fascinated by what they were doing, joined the group, and have spent most of my career continuing lines of research that began then.

I see relatively little planning in my career. Most important for me was that I was able to find research that interested me. And two people in particular, Standing and Dicke, guided me to directions of thinking that have proved to be interesting and productive.

2. What do you think is important to become a successful scientist? How would you define success in science?

Do not judge success by prizes and awards. They necessarily are capricious.

Centrally important to me has been fascination with what I am doing. Success? To be able to keep doing it!

3. What advice would you give to students who are just starting their journeys in science?

Each journey will be different; the common theme will be the search for what you would really and realistically want to do with your life.