



Journalistic writing

Tips on how to make academic research accessible (copied in part from the Mediagids (Media Guide) of NWO), by Jeanine de Bruin

Be topical

Try to link your research to a topical subject or recent news item. And vice versa: if your research subject is suddenly a hot political topic, that is a good time to publish an article. It will get more readers.

Draw attention

A catchy title, an engaging introduction and an attractive illustration will draw more attention. This is especially important in our society where people are bombarded with information.

Use plain English

- Avoid jargon: look for simple words to replace complicated terms. Words such as 'semantics', 'discourse', 'objectify' and 'utilisation' are not everyday words.
- Avoid professional language in disguise: words that do not sound strange as such, but nevertheless are not understood by most. Examples: tissue-specific, labour market flexibility, starting qualifications, task autonomy, intertidal zone or loss factor.
- Finally, be aware of the different meanings words can have in everyday use and in a scientific context: model, data or studies.
- Use active and direct English. Always try to use the active voice instead of the passive. ('she did research into' instead of 'research was done').
- Choose synonyms or metaphors if you find you are using a word too often.
- Be concrete, call a spade a spade.
- Avoid literary style to promote readability.
- Limit the use of reference words, eg, 'this', 'that', 'former', 'latter', 'aforementioned', 'as mentioned below'. Make your statements unambiguous.

Write for the internet

Many people will be reading your text on a screen, and it will be much easier for them if you take the following points into account:

- Write short sentences of no more than two lines.
- Do not use too many subordinate clauses, no more than one per sentence.
- Use bullet-points more often, and dots or em-dashes.
- Divide text into smaller parts and use more subheadings than you usually would.
- Use illustrations

Be brief

Most people do not read a text thoroughly, instead they try to skim read the essence of the message. So it pays to invest time in constructing your first paragraph to state the conclusion of your study in a few pithy sentences. Try to describe your research in 1000 – 1500 words. That is approximately three typed pages on A4, in font size 10 or 11.



Visualise your research

Particularly on the internet, illustrations could be the key to catching the attention of people who see your article pass by in a matter of seconds. If the first impression is appealing, they will be more inclined to continue reading.

What are the best subjects for an illustration?

- your research subject
- a metaphor for your results
- a fine art object or painting (with a link to your research)
- a picture of yourself (preferably in action)
- detail photographs
- pictures with bold colours

Also suitable, if adapted:

- tables in abbreviated format
- simple graphs
- a detail of your lab situation
- images of research data, eg, MRI scan, DNA patterns

Not suitable:

- picture of the whole department
- picture of the building
- vague or blurry pictures
- long distance shots
- unreadable diagrams or flow charts