Finding your Audience & Communicating your Message

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If you’ve ever gotten a card like this…

...this session is for you!
What concerns do you have when thinking about communicating about your work on your BC project?

What are some of the challenges?
Why do people struggle to communicate their message?
More information ≠

Greater understanding or acceptance
People Don’t Always Behave As Expected
Why Does This Happen?

Confirmation Bias

- Confirm what they already believe, while ignoring contrary data
- Develop elaborate rationalizations to justify beliefs that logic and evidence have disproved
- Respond defensively to contrary evidence, actively discrediting it
What Else Can I Do...

...To Communicate Effectively?
What Is Your MESSAGE?

It should be...

• Easily understood
• Memorable
• Focused
• Framed to be relevant to your audience
AUDIENCE - AUDIENCE - AUDIENCE!
In ONE SENTENCE, explain your BC project to:

• Level 1 – A colleague at a professional conference
• Level 2 – A Duke undergrad
• Level 3 – A 3rd grader
Be Concise!

“Professor Horvath’s ‘Intro to Existentialism’ lecture was famously concise.”
Avoiding Jargon
(i.e. talking like a real person)
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- To conduct a study that will help determine
- Elucidated the mechanisms by which...
- Foster interdisciplinary collaborations...

To study
Showed how
Build teams
Simplify “Number Jargon”

47.65% (p<.0532) = About half

32 million Americans = 1-in-10 Americans

“The largest dinosaurs had brains about 8 cm in diameter” = “The largest dinosaurs had brains about the size of a baseball”
If you MUST use jargon...

• Keep it to a minimum
• Define it first, and then introduce the term
• Make sure the definition is provided the first time you use the term

But, mostly.....

TRY TO AVOID JARGON!
HOW STORYTELLING AFFECTS THE BRAIN

NEURAL COUPLING
A story activates parts in the brain that allows the listener to turn the story in to their own ideas and experience thanks to a process called neural coupling.

MIRRORING
Listeners will not only experience the similar brain activity to each other, but also to the speaker.

DOPAMINE
The brain releases dopamine into the system when it experiences an emotionally-charged event, making it easier to remember and with greater accuracy.

CORTEX ACTIVITY
When processing facts, two areas of the brain are activated (Broca’s and Wernicke’s area). A well-told story can engage many additional areas, including the motor cortex, sensory cortex and frontal cortex.
A Few Things That You Might Find in a Great Research Story...
Narrative Arc
Outrageous Methodology
Compelling Characters

Is Kary Mullis God?

(Or just the big kahuna?)

By Emily Voege

Kary Mullis, winner of the Nobel Prize in Chemistry, is a real-life Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. He is one of the most important and controversial figures in the field of biochemistry. Mullis is known for his groundbreaking work on the polymerase chain reaction (PCR), a technique that allows scientists to amplify DNA sequences. Despite his scientific achievements, Mullis has been embroiled in several controversies, including allegations of scientific misconduct.

In this article, Emily Voege explores the life and work of Kary Mullis, examining his contributions to science and his role in shaping the field of biochemistry. Voege delves into Mullis's personal life, his relationships, and his impact on the scientific community.

For more information on Kary Mullis and his work, visit the pages linked below:

1. [Kary Mullis's Nobel Prizes](https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/chemistry/1989/mullis/bio/)
2. [Kary Mullis's Scientific Contributions](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK19563/)
3. [Kary Mullis's Controversies](https://www.scientificaledge.com/kary-mullis-controversies/)

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*Image: Surfing with Kary Mullis in the US Open of Surfing*
A Scientist's 20-Year Quest To Defeat Dengue Fever

Nine minutes on NPR!
Be Definitive!
A Few More Tips...

• Make it personal
• Use analogies and metaphors
• Use humor and/or drama
• Provide statistics
• Hook them with something surprising or counterintuitive
• Tap in to your passion for the topic
Research Outputs

- What Is Your Communication Goal?
- What Is Your Message?
- What Is Your Medium?
- Who Is Your Audience?
Who Is Your Audience?

• General public
• Some defined subset of GP
• Community stakeholders
• Students/teachers/parents
• Faculty/administration
• The media
• Policy makers
• Patients (and their family/friends)
• Clinicians
• Funders (or potential funders)
What Is Your Communication Goal?

- To inform
- To educate
- To train
- To guide
- To persuade
- To advocate
- To excite
- To recruit
- To transform
What Is Your MESSAGE?

It should be...

- Easily understood
- Memorable
- Focused
- Framed to be relevant to your audience
What Is Your Medium?

- Research papers, reports, white papers, research summaries
- Pamphlets, brochures, infographics
- Public fora (e.g., science cafés)
- Online chats/AMAs
- Blogs
- Podcasts
- OpEds/commentaries
- Policy briefs/policy memos
- Social media campaigns
- Other?
Spend about 10 minutes sketching out a plan (i.e., a pitch) for your BC research output(s)...

Ask yourself the following questions:

• Why is this the best output for your work?
• Are you missing important stakeholders by focusing too narrowly on a certain audience (e.g., policy makers)?
• What are the assumptions you’re making about your team’s research by the type of output you’re focusing on?
• Can you expand or shift your audience by considering another form of communication or by prioritizing another audience/stakeholder?

The goal isn’t to get you to decommit from a path you’re planning to take, but to get you to think creatively and expansively about who you want to talk to and why.
Research Outputs

What Is Your Communication Goal?

What Is Your Message?

What Is Your Medium?

Who Is Your Audience?
In small groups, spend about 20 minutes sharing your plan and giving/getting feedback.

Ask each other:

• What are you doing and why does it matter?
• Who are you talking to and how are you talking to them?
• What do you actually want to say?
• Are you choosing the best media to share your message (e.g., does it make sense for your policy memo to also be translated into an op-ed)?

The desired result of this activity is an action plan for how to best communicate your team’s research through the desired output(s), and to really understand why your team is focused on a particular medium, audience or set of stakeholders.
Research Outputs

Who Is Your Audience?

What Is Your Communication Goal?

What Is Your Message?

What Is Your Medium?