

5 TIPS FOR MAKING KNOWLEDGE HAVE AN IMPACT

1. Lower the bar

All people, be they decision-makers or researchers, are flooded by a tremendous amount of messages during an ordinary workday. Although research reports are crying out to be read, they seldom are. If we want people to hear about the results of research, we must tell them – often several times. While this constant influx of new information may lessen the value of a single message, fortunately it makes mishaps smaller too.

2. Ask why you are communicating

This should be an easy question, but it usually makes people squirm. Let us reformulate: Why do you do your work? Why are you passionate about this area of research? The answers apply to communication, too. Communication and interaction become motivating when we set goals for them. What decisions or behaviours should change in light of this new information? Where will the topic be discussed? What does your research bring to the discussion? Why does your research matter?

3. Find the right audience

Rather than trying to reach the largest possible audience, try to find the audience most in need of your information. Identify the decision-makers, officials, and reporters who will be discussing your topic. Be active in contacting these parties and share your results. Be gentle with your audience: spare them the nitty-gritty details of your research, unless it is requested. Think about what approach is best suited for each person. If reaching out makes you nervous, remember that the main focus is on the research, not the researcher. Society has a need for scientific knowledge – a need that may already be brewing outside the academic world.

4. Suggest lunch or send a Tweet

What is the easiest way to reach your boss, friend, partner or child? Some people never answer e-mails, while others prefer text messages. Plan your message with the recipient in mind. A busy reporter or decision-maker will appreciate a layman's summary by e-mail or on the phone. Make a few bullet points comprising the most important parts of your topic and be prepared to present the same information verbally in 30 seconds. Think of three people or parties who at least should hear about your research, and invite them for coffee or lunch. Trust people to ask more if you spark an interest.

5. Reap the benefits

Communication and interaction has a positive influence on your actual research, too. As well as clearing up your thoughts, communicating and summarising in layman's terms offers a good counterbalance to academic writing. On Twitter, for instance, you can ponder future findings or problems together with other researchers. Furthermore, communicating research findings on social media has been shown to increase the dissemination and referencing of reports. Interacting has its rewards!