

2 How best to communicate your research

There are many different ways to communicate your research and how this is best done will depend on what you are trying to say and who you are saying it to.

In particular, it is important to recognise that different audiences use, require and respond to different approaches. Whilst academics will expect to read about your research in a clear and standardised format in high-quality, peer-reviewed journals, presenting your findings to non-specialist audiences will require different communication techniques.

Non-specialist audiences can include policy and decision makers, stakeholders and practitioners from a wider variety of professional backgrounds; it can also refer to members of the public or specific interest groups.

2.1 What are the main forms of research communication?

There are several, well-established forms of communicating research. We can make a distinction between ‘academic’ and ‘non-academic’ dissemination, based on the intended audience for the communication. However, be aware that there is some overlap and some forms of communication, e.g. lecture presentations, may be appropriate for a range of audiences, albeit in an adapted style.

Academic dissemination primarily consists of:

- journal articles
- books
- conference presentations
- academic lectures
- workshops
- seminars

Non-academic dissemination may include:

- policy briefs
- reports
- submissions of evidence (e.g. to parliamentary committees)
- blogs
- public lectures
- press releases and interviews
- stakeholder and knowledge exchange events
- social media posts
- newsletters
- podcasts
- infographics
- videos

2.2 Academic and non-academic communication

Academic dissemination provides you with the opportunity to showcase your research to others familiar with your field. The aim of academic communication is to develop ideas, create or contribute to a debate within the field and, ultimately, to advance knowledge within your academic discipline.

Academic conferences, seminars and workshops provide focused forums for researchers to present their work to knowledgeable audiences and elicit feedback from those with expertise in the field. This is often an important precursor to formal dissemination through publication in scholarly journals, books or reports.

Communicating your research to non-academic audiences requires different techniques and skills to the often-very-standardised format of academic dissemination. There are a wide range of channels you can use to engage with non-specialist audiences.

For example:

Stakeholder and knowledge exchange events

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Dissemination events can take many forms, including conferences, public lectures and round table discussions. Some are more costly and time-consuming to run than others and may be focused around a theme or with a keynote presentation that details the findings of recent research. They can seek to reach a targeted audience of influential groups, or aim for a more general reach amongst those interested in the topic of the research.

Talking to policy and decision makers directly

Identifying your audience first allows you to target a small number of key contacts. A great way of making your case and showing your expertise and passion for a subject is to drop them an email, pick up the phone, attend an event they are at, or ask them for a meeting.

Policy briefings

These are short documents highlighting key policy messages arising from a piece of academic research. They should be tightly targeted at the intended audience, written in plain English, and include a call to action.

Blogs, podcasts and social media

Can be an effective and engaging way to reach a broad, global audience, ranging from policy and decision makers, to the general public, journalists and fellow academics. They can give a sense of immediacy and ‘freshness’ to your research and are often easier for policy makers to engage with and share compared to academic papers or briefings.

Traditional media

Is helpful for building the profile of your research, bringing an issue to the attention of the public, policy and decision makers, and driving forward your recommendations. You can use press releases and media interviews to establish your status as an expert on the topic, or send a summary of your research to a journalist who is likely to be interested in your findings.