

...talk about your science



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Anke Kautz is a graduate media consultant and has worked as a journalist for 25 years. As a trained coach and mediator, she works in scientific institutions.

Anke uses her expertise from both fields to address science communication, to coach scientists in this area and to share her knowledge in workshops.

Of course, you do this every day with your colleagues and peers. But this is about a different aspect - namely, talking about your research in public. Science communication is an important part of research today. Not least the past pandemic years have just brought your research field into the public eye. It also showed how many ways there are for science communication and what it can mean for scientists to become a public person.

But why should you talk about research in public when your career depends on scientific publications and not on how often you talk about research in public? The answer is, for different reasons.

Of course, it is about making results known and bringing scientific content into society. There is hardly an area of society in which scientific findings are not used or at least are the basis for decisions.

But another crucial function of science communication is to show how science works, how scientists gain knowledge. They are increasingly expected to explain their work. Science needs to be recognizable as a process of asking questions, searching, and finding answers,

disproving them, and continuing to search for new ones. It is exactly this transparency that allows lay people to understand what science can do and that science does not produce facts on an assembly line that politicians or economists can simply take to make decisions. So, it's not just about explaining things in an understandable way. It is more about creating a dialogue between science and society about how science works and how it can become a good basis for orientation in our very complex world.

In addition, funding organizations have now included science communication as a requirement in their funding guidelines. To receive such funding, you have to be visible in public with your research.

Last but not least: Science communication is also about making science tangible. Telling children and young people about scientific work can arouse their curiosity. And maybe you get to know your future colleagues this way.

But how do you succeed in talking about your own research in a lively and accessible way?

Know your target group

First of all, you should know your target group. The more precisely you know your audience, the better you can tailor your message to them. This article focuses on non-experts as your target audience, which is huge. So, who exactly is to read, hear, or watch your information? Students, colleagues from other fields, politicians, association members, journalists, teenager, children?

The target group plays an important role because the language you use depends on it. The biggest challenge is to adapt your language:

- Translate technical and English terms into everyday language. It's worth putting some brainpower into because then more people will understand what you are talking about. And it gives more people access to knowledge.
- Translate dry figures and data by drawing comparisons from everyday life, so that your audience can get an idea of them.
- Use language rich in images to illustrate your statements.

- It is also much more fun to listen to you or read your texts if you use lively language. Use verbs instead of noun monsters.
- Formulate clearly and in short sentences. This is especially true when you are giving interviews or recording podcasts and people need to listen to you. Of course, it is often difficult to simplify complex issues. Therefore, you should explicitly name the balancing act you have to perform to achieve this. Say that you deliberately simplify complex issues to reach as many people as possible. This also takes the wind out of the sails of experts who might criticize you for simplifying matters. Sandra Ciesek and Christian Drosten can serve as good examples from your field. Both have kept large audiences informed in their podcasts under great time pressure while retaining their individual ways of speaking and presenting facts. Essential to their success with the podcast was that they became visible as personalities. They also worked with good science journalists.

Choose your medium

It is also important to consider which medium will fit your purpose best and what would you enjoy doing. Social media are providing platforms to reach huge audiences. However, the battle for attention may also tempt you to make quick oversimplified statements.

If you use classic media such as newspapers, radio or television you work with journalists who know what their audience wants. They help you break down your complex issues into morsels that people can digest easily.

Other formats are nights of science, children's universities or open house days. For these to succeed, it is crucial to have fun entertaining people and to have patience for many questions.

Prepare yourself

No matter which medium you choose, it is always worth to invest time in being well prepared. The following questions can help you:

- Who do I want to address or reach?
- What do I want to say?
- Why do I want this? What is my goal?
- Where do I want to communicate?
- How do I say it?

And, finally – as always in life,
practice makes perfect.

If you have topics for the „how to“ section we have not yet touched, please email to jGfV@G-f-V.org.