
Faculty Research Forum

In the Public Eye

Office of the Dean for Research

April 16, 2021

Why communicate

- Inspire others to learn and grow
- Improve the public's understanding
- Attract funding or investment
- Spur unexpected endpoints:
 - New collaborations
 - Interdisciplinary work

Developing your strategy

- What goals do I want to accomplish?
- What audiences do I want to reach?
- Which are the best ways to reach these audiences?
- Who can I get to help me?

Who are my intended audiences?

Understanding your audience will help you determine your approach. Each of these audiences obtains information from different sources:

- The public
- Research sponsors
- Investors/entrepreneurs
- Prospective graduate students
- Policy makers

Ways to reach your audiences

- External media interviews for print, podcasts, videos and TV
- 1st-person pieces: Op-eds, [The Conversation](#)
- Social media
- Outreach to community groups, presentations, citizen science
- Policy makers: Work with campus offices in government, regional and community affairs

Who can help

Offices that provide research communications services

Strategy - Writing - Video - Media outreach and preparation

- [Office of Communications](#)
- School of Engineering and Applied Sciences: [Communications](#)
- School of Public and International Affairs: [Communications](#)
- Princeton Plasma Physics Laboratory [Communications](#)
- Office of the Dean for Research: [Communications](#)
- The Humanities Council [Communications](#)
- High Meadows Environmental Institute [Communications](#)
- Andlinger Center for Energy and the Environment [Communications](#)
- Your department or affiliated center (Comp Sci, Econ, Chemistry, CSML...)

Tips for working with on-campus communicators

- Notify your communications specialist early - at the time your research is accepted for publication.
- Find ways to create attractive visuals or explanatory videos. Do you have any students who have an interest in this area?
- Work with your communications specialist to identify channels (social media accounts, online outlets, outside media) to help you reach your audiences.
- Share the resulting article or video with your own audiences.
- Use the DOI link when you tweet - tracking services such as Plum Analytics and Altmetrics use DOIs to track mentions of your research.

General tips for engaging

- Use clear language. Spend time to create a non-technical brief description of your research that you can use anytime you want to talk to non-technical audiences.
- Find common ground with your audience (analogies, examples)
- Avoid the curse of knowledge (don't assume everyone knows what a protein is)
- Don't use specialist terms. Use an everyday word if possible.
- Give people a reason to care:
 - Empathy, emotion, storytelling
 - Who will this help? What was unexpected or surprising?
 - Why are you motivated to do this work?
- Provide concrete examples. Be specific, and include sensory details.
- Provide striking visuals and video if possible.

Working with the outside media

- Identify journalists who you think do well at covering your field. When you have a research discovery, you can reach out to them or ask your Princeton communications specialist to do so.
- Prior to talking to an outside journalist, investigate the person's credentials or contact the Office of Communications or your department communications specialist.
- Be wary of journalistic outlets that ask you to pay for coverage. While some of these are legitimate, consider the reach of their audiences when deciding if these are worthwhile. You can often get similar coverage through Princeton's communications specialists.
- During interviews, you are on the record unless you obtain the journalist's agreement that you are off the record. Even then, it is best to say only what you would like to be repeated.
- Ask journalists if you can review the final wording for accuracy. If the journalist says no, ask if the journalist will read it to you. Your goal is accuracy, and most journalists also want accuracy, so often you can find middle ground.
- For video interviews, wear solid colors. For Zoom interviews, ensure that you have bright lighting in place and that the background is free of distracting clutter.

Tips for using social media

- Identify the social media platform where your audience tends to spend time. Science utilizes Twitter quite a lot. Undergraduates tend to use Instagram. Professionals like LinkedIn. Family members use Facebook. Young audiences appreciate TikTok. These trends change over time.
- The University provides a glossary of terms and a list of official campus accounts at socialmedia.princeton.edu.

Tips for working with policy makers

Princeton has two offices that provide guidance on working with government representatives:

- Princeton's [Office of Government Affairs](#) (OGA) has responsibility for coordinating all federal advocacy work on behalf of the University before Congress, Congressional staff, and key Administration officials.
 - Faculty members who represent the University when communicating Congress and the Administration must coordinate with OGA due to reporting requirements.
 - OGA recommends reaching out regarding any requests to communicate with Congress, their staff and the Administration. The Office can provide support and also identify potential concerns.
- Princeton's [Office of Public Affairs](#) advocates on behalf of the University before state legislators and executive branch officials. Please contact the Office of Public Affairs if you want to contact or have been contacted by a legislator or state government official, are looking for help with a regulatory or legislative issue, or have research that could be relevant to state policymakers.

Tips for engaging with the community

Community groups, clubs, service organizations, classrooms, citizen science programs, museums and other outlets can provide opportunities for communication. A number of offices on campus can provide ideas or inspiration for engaging with the community.

- The [Office of Community and Regional Affairs](#) can help identify service opportunities and initiatives.
- [Pace Center for Civic Engagement](#)
- [Princeton Center for Complex Materials](#)
- [Princeton Plasma Physics Laboratory](#)
- [Princeton University Preparatory Program](#)
- [Prison Teaching Initiative](#)
- [Program for Community-Engaged Scholarship](#)
- [Program in Teacher Preparation](#)

Tips for writing op-eds

Courtesy of the School of Public and International Affairs

- Be aware of the word count of submissions for that particular media outlet. (Most places won't take a 3,000 word academic piece, for example, so you don't want to send to them.)
- Read what they've been publishing in the past month. If your piece is too closely aligned to another, they'll likely reject it.
- Your lede (or introductory sentence) should be a peg to a news item. This will increase the chances of acceptance. Then you can flow into your main points.
- The overall structure should mirror this:
 - Introductory sentence related to current events
 - Your thesis statement (what your research shows, for example).
 - Three facts that back-up your thesis.
 - A strong closing tying it back to the future of the country, your industry, or a particular policy issue
- Always avoid jargon and academic terms. Read op-eds to get a flavor of how these should be written. You have more wiggle room here for a "play on words" or interesting phrasing.

Tips for writing op-eds Part 2

- When pitching, remember to follow the instructions listed. Most want you to submit to a general inbox (opinion@nytimes.com). You can also copy the opinion editor of that paper and address them personally. (Dear Mark ...) Use your contacts; if you know someone else at the paper, they may be willing to forward it.
- Send your text in the body of an email with a word count, proposed headline (knowing they'll likely change it), your name. At the end, include a brief bio.
 - Some prefer Word documents, but we find these get stuck in spam filters.
- If they like it, they will generally follow-up quickly. You can send a reminder perhaps 48 hours later. (Sometimes a day later is too nagging/annoying.)
- Also check the instructions on the wait time. For some, it's three business days. For others, it's 10 business days. Plan accordingly.
- If you get rejected, save the email. Respond back to that email when you have another op-ed. If they take the time to respond, they might not mind hearing from you again (if enough time has passed).
- Do not submit simultaneous submissions; that's just bad form.
- Never send a pitch on a Friday. Tuesday morning is the sweet spot.