

Content creation for consumers

CERI User Guide

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Acknowledgement

This chapter of the User Guide is one in a series available from [The Australian Prevention Partnership Centre website](#).

It was prepared by members of the Coordinating Group to provide practical tips on knowledge mobilisation and science communication for researchers working in the prevention of chronic disease.

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Types of content

Below are examples of different content types that may appeal to a consumer (public) audience.

Type of article	Description	When would I invest in this?
Media release	A communication to the media about breaking news. It can be sent to a broad range of media outlets but can also be targeted at specific journalists. Aims to generate interest in a subject so that the journalist produces their own story about it.	When you have a significant research finding that you wish to publicise; to boost your organisation's profile; to advocate on a news issue or attract media attention.
News story	A short story (usually 400-600 words) conveying essential information about a finding or development. It is written in the third person and contains different points of view.	Useful for your website or newsletters, to keep partners engaged or showcase your work.
Opinion article (oped)	An oped (O pposite the E ditorial page in a broadsheet newspaper) is an article of around 800 words that presents an opinion. It can be informed by research, but its primary purpose is to make an argument for something rather than convey research findings. The articles in the Conversation are all opinion pieces.	A good way of getting exposure when you don't have anything necessarily newsworthy for the media. Useful for advocacy and to disseminate research to a broad audience.
Feature	A feature is a long-form print article, generally around 1200-1500 words (can be longer). It canvases a range of voices and different evidence sources.	Mainly the domain of the media, but you may use a feature in an annual report or partner publication
Case study	A short article or a few paragraphs that humanises an aspect of a story.	Fantastic for your website – to humanise your research or demonstrate impact. Journalists will often ask for case studies, so it's helpful to have them pre-written and handy.
Infographic	A depiction of data or information in visual form.	Useful in policy briefs and reports.
Podcast	A long-form audio file, often in the form of a discussion.	A good way of showcasing research and individual researchers; a way of contributing to public debate and attracting attention.
Video	TV and radio outlets do not generally take material generated by external organisations. However, they are always looking for case studies, footage, pre-recorded audio, and experts to quote.	Useful for social media or your website.

Why create consumer content about your research?

Publicising research used to depend on coverage in the media. However, it is more difficult than ever before to generate media interest in public health research. There are fewer journalists and fewer traditional media outlets. In addition, more people are accessing content online such as from social media (Facebook, YouTube, Twitter), as well as online reviews, Google searches, company websites and forum threads.

For these reasons, many organisations self-publish their own content. Writing and publishing your own media-type articles, and disseminating them among your networks, provides a variety of effective ways of disseminating your research. These can be published on your website, shared through social media or to targeted audiences, and sometimes offered to mainstream media for publication.

While traditional media outlets generally write for members of the public, remember that our key audiences are consumers too. Policy makers, other researchers, funders and politicians all consume media, and may be attracted and/or influenced by different ways of imparting knowledge beyond traditional academic outputs.

Writing tips

Each content type listed above is written and presented in a different way. Here are some tips for writing your own content.

Media release

The aim of a media release is to summarise succinctly the finding that you wish to promote and encourage journalists to contact you to discuss further and write their own story.

Media releases also raise an organisation's or researcher's profile as a trusted commentator on a certain issue.

Tips

- The headline should summarise the key message you wish to convey in an eye-catching, compelling way.
- Include the date and location of the study.
- The first paragraph should again summarise the key message. Do not assume a journalist will read anything other than the headline and possibly the first paragraph.
- Include the name of your organisation in the first paragraph.
- Include direct quotes from the researchers in the body of the media release. Journalists will often use these word-for-word in their story. Make sure people's names and titles are correct. The quotes should encapsulate your key messages. Generally 2-3 quotes is sufficient.
- An ideal length for a media release is around 400 words. No more than 600 words. (One page ideal, two pages at the most).
- Include links to research if you like but references are not necessary.

For examples of media releases, visit your university's media pages or look at the [Prevention Centre](#).

News story

A news story is a short-form summary of something newsworthy. To be newsworthy it must be a new finding, take the debate further than before, or be something quirky and unusual.

The news story must answer each of these questions: **Who? What? When? Where? Why? How?**

Tips

- A news story has an inverted pyramid structure. The top contains the most newsworthy information, followed by important details, followed by general and background information.
- First think of the angle for the story, the 'hook'. A news story only has **one angle** (or message). Do not try to encapsulate all your messages into one news story.
- Summarise the angle in the first paragraph – in roughly 30 words.
- Expand on the angle in the next two paragraphs (one sentence only per paragraph).
- Include a direct quote from the researcher/s involved in the findings.
- Provide context for this research finding – why is it important right now?
- Flesh out the findings in the rest of the story, with more quotes where appropriate. You can bring in a range of voices.
- Media outlets will canvas a range of conflicting viewpoints in a news story in order to provide balance. If you are describing a research finding you do not necessarily need to do that.
- If the story is running online, for example, on a news website or industry blog, include hyperlinks where relevant.
- References are not necessary.

For examples of news stories, read any news site or look at [Prevention Centre news](#).

Opinion article (oped)

An opinion article builds an argument. It is not a report about research – but an informed opinion about the implications of research for action.

Tips

- Start with an engaging first paragraph that will grab the reader's interest. It can be short statement of fact.
- Early on, explain the context – what is this article adding to the debate, why should readers continue?
- Answer the essential questions of who, what, where, when, why (and how).
- Make sure there is a call to action – what you would like people to do, how they should act or what should they change as a result of your research.
- Though the structure need not be as rigid as with a news story, put the important information first
- Write in a conversational tone. Do not use jargon or academic language – ever.
- Reference contentious statements (you can use inline links).
- Finish strongly – summarise or reiterate the point made in the opening paragraph.

Examples

[Prescribe a run in the park for better health](#)

[You've heard of clinician scientists. We're applying the same model to public health](#)

[4 reasons schools should let students wear sports uniforms every day](#)

[Language matters: pregnancy and overweight or obesity](#)

[How the alcohol industry exerts influence to block life-saving policies](#)

Feature

A feature is a long-form article that explores a topic in more depth. It contains a range of views and angles, but it still focuses on one central idea or theme. Sometimes features can profile a person.

A feature can be more emotive than a news story; it presents research in a narrative form. Great writing and structure are important to encourage the reader to continue to the end.

Features are usually found in magazines or weekend newspapers as well as university publications. They can be a good option to engage diverse readers and generate public interest in your research. As there does not need to be a news angle, features are also an opportunity to explore the background issues to prevention.

Tips

- Plot the narrative – background, complication, resolution.
- The first few paragraphs should be compelling – a case study or story works well here.
- After a few paragraphs, include a 'nub par' – the nub or summary of what is at the heart of this feature.
- Use short paragraphs.
- Include direct quotes from a range of different sources.
- Support statements with evidence in the form of a direct quote (expert opinion is evidence), statistics, case studies.
- The tone can be informal and personal. Use descriptive or emotive language.
- Other language techniques you can use include rhetorical questions, anecdotes and imagery.
- You can use the second person ('you') to build a relationship with the reader.
- In the conclusion, summarise the feature and include a call to action.

Examples

[How health and justice concerns are driving the rise of independent political candidates](#)

[From bootcamps in China to Australian schools: How vapes hook children on nicotine](#)

[Joining the dots: how wide-ranging forces are undermining public health responses to the pandemic](#)

[Professor Luke Wolfenden \(profile\)](#)

Case study

A case study is used to humanise a situation or development. For researchers, case studies can be a powerful way of evoking an emotional response by showing impact in the real world. For example, a case study might describe a person who has given up smoking due to plain packaging laws, or someone who does not exercise because there are no walking paths in their area.

There is no set structure for a case study – it can be in any of the other forms described here.

Tips

- Think of a compelling human story that illustrates the point you are trying to make (See chapter on Storytelling). Tell the story of the research through their eyes.
- Make sure the case study is relatable for the target audience.
- Structure the case study like a story:
 - Beginning (what is the situation – the problem to be solved?)
 - Middle (what happened to disrupt that situation – or what would the solution be to this situation?)
 - End (how is the world better as a result?)
- Include enough details for the reader to feel empathy for the protagonist.
- Include direct quotes from the protagonist – so the reader can hear their voice.
- When discussing the disruption/solution, include as much detail as possible.

Infographic

An infographic is a visual depiction of a story or data. They are good for conveying key messages quickly and effectively. Most readers look at the infographic on a page before they read the text.

You can create your own infographic using a platform such as [Canva](#), [Adobe](#) or [DesignCap](#) – there are many more. The other option is to engage a professional designer to create your infographic. This is often the best choice as a designer will know the best design techniques to convey information.

There are some important considerations when creating the content for the infographic.

Tips

- As with a news story or media release, identify your key messages.
- Now write these down using as few words as possible. One very brief sentence per key message.
- Order the messages so they tell a story. e.g. What was the problem, what you did, what was the outcome? Infographics are particularly effective to demonstrate trends and movement.
- Is there any data that you can take from the research that could be presented visually?
- Do not try to cover too much ground. Infographics with too much information are overwhelming.
- If you can't convey the message in just a few words, then perhaps an infographic is not the correct product.

Examples

[AIHW](#)

Prevention Centre [Liveability findings brief](#) and [Healthy Equitable Eating findings brief](#)

[Australian Men's Health Forum](#)

[McCrinkle](#)

Podcasts

Podcasts are digital audio files that a user can download and listen to. The content can vary from a short (2 minute) summary of your results to longer pieces that cover a particular topic or discussion.¹

The audience for podcasts is growing. They can be an effective way of communicating information to busy people who want to be kept up to date. They can also personalise information, create connections, and provide insights in an engaging way.

To create a professional podcast, you need the right recording equipment. It may be best to engage professional support for this. However, it is also possible to create a podcast on your phone or using free downloaded software.

Tips

- Find a theme for the podcast series. Why are you doing it, and who is it for? Think of a catchy title. You can do a one-off podcast – but it is better to have several in a series so you can create a following.
- Choose the angle for each episode. Don't try to cover all elements of research – make sure you have an angle and structure the podcast around that.
- Choose the talent. The person delivering the podcast should be passionate about their work and be able to talk about it in a conversational way. Make sure they avoid all jargon.
- Podcasts work well as a conversation or interview format. Scripted podcasts can sound very stilted unless they are presented by a professional.
- Record the podcast in a quiet place. Position recording equipment correctly.
- Use editing software. Editing can be as simple as removing mistakes and distracting sounds, or completely re-ordering the content to tell a story.
- Save the file and export as an MP3.
- Upload to a platform such as [Whooshkaa](#), [Spotify](#), [Apple Podcasts](#) or [Google Podcasts](#).

For more help, read this [Cochrane explainer](#).

¹ <https://training.cochrane.org/online-learning/knowledge-translation/how-share-cochrane-evidence/choose-right-dissemination-produ-6>

Videos

Video is becoming an increasingly important communications tool. It allows the audience to access both visual and audio content to improve retention of information and develop a deeper connection. Videos can be uploaded onto websites, embedded in slides, or disseminated via social media.²

Anyone can create a video with a smartphone and some editing software, but the results will be far superior if you engage a professional.

Tips

When organising information for a video script:

- Identify audience and purpose
- Define the key messages – keep these brief and to the point
- Decide on the type of video you want. There are many different forms – someone speaking to camera, a professional voiceover, an interview, an animation ...
- Choose talent – someone who can talk casually and engagingly, without looking as if they are reading a script.
- Think of imagery that supports the key messages – can be file footage, slides, infographics, a talking head.
- Write the script and determine which visual elements go with each part of the script.
- Keep the script short. Most videos should not be longer than two or three minutes at most. People speak about two to three words per second.
- Make sure the main message is in the first 30 seconds.
- Ensure there is a balance between words and images. In a video, visual imagery as important if not more important than the words.
- Add subtitles to aid understanding or reinforce messages.

For tips on creating video content, read this [Cochrane explainer](#).

² <https://training.cochrane.org/online-learning/knowledge-translation/how-share-cochrane-evidence/choose-right-dissemination-produ-8>