



RESEARCH: HOW DO YOU GET IT OUT THERE ?

APRIL 2015 • LISA DE HAARDT • HANS VAN DE WATER



During the study day, researchers were given tips on how to publicise their research with more success (photo: Jesse Willems)

CONTENT

- 04** **Why publicise your research?**
 Four reasons why you should and five why you shouldn't.
- 06** **Media investigation**
 What stories get into what media? We investigated.
- 08** **'Your story has to have a wow factor'**
 Koen Wauters (VRT) teaches us how to think like a journalist.
- 12** **How do you get into the media?**
 Eight tips for getting noticed and four subjects that get a result.
- 19** **Support and assistance at your own institution**
 What can the communication department do and what's the best way to approach it?
- 24** **The basic ingredients of effective communication**
 The starting point for all communication: define your goal, your target group and your message.
- 28** **Newspaper, TV, Facebook or village hall?**
 The characteristics of the various communication channels.
- 31** **Ten tips from the experts**
 Using press releases, presentations, interviews, photos and more.

06 / MEDIA INVESTIGATION



08 / THINK LIKE A JOURNALIST



28 / NEWSPAPER, TV, FACEBOOK OR ... ?



31 / TEN TIPS FROM THE EXPERTS



10

COMMUNICATION LESSONS YOU SHOULD NEVER FORGET

1. There is no magic formula

Communication is not an exact science. We give you tips on what usually works but no two situations are ever the same. That makes communication such an exciting adventure.

2. Begin with the basics

What do you want to achieve, who is your target group and what are you going to say? Always start by answering these questions. The stronger the basics of your communication are, the more likely you are to make an impact.

3. Better together

Look for assistance from professionals and people who have an interest in your message being put out there. Be sure to contact your communication department.

4. Learn from others

Look for inspiring examples from colleagues who publicize their research. How do they do it? What can you learn from that? Try it yourself.

5. Patience is a virtue

Communication pays, but you'll only see the benefits in the long run. So don't lose faith if Bill Gates does not call you immediately to ask if he can fund your research.

6. Make it fun

Getting your message across has to give you satisfaction. Focus on the aspects of your research you like. Passion is infectious. Share yours with your audience.

7. Keep it simple

People have to be able to understand you. Use clear language and minimise the use of jargon. Use tangible examples to bring your research alive. Focus on one message.

8. Attract attention

Most people couldn't care less about your research. Why is it special or relevant? How do you make a difference? Exit your comfort zone and look for ways to excite your audience.

9. Don't forget the regional media

You're probably focused on the national press, but our research shows that you have a much better chance of getting your message across to a wide audience in the regional media.

10. Do it!

You learn by doing, by trial and error. Take every opportunity to get your message across. Read this handbook then get to work.

WE WANT TO PUBLICISE WHAT WE DO MORE. YOU TOO?

Why should you invest in communication? You're under pressure to publish and you have little time for anything other than your research or teaching commitments. Or you're not sure how to start and who to turn to for help.

In this handbook we show that publicising your research is a very worthwhile thing to do. **We give you concrete examples and practical tips**, to help you make an impact by getting your message across.

We focus first and foremost on **researchers and people involved in international projects**. Our cases deal with cooperation with partners in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Our definition of 'publicise' is communicating with a wide audience rather than simply experts in the field.

Why is there a need to publicise more?

VLIR-UOS supports **partnerships between universities and university colleges in Flanders and the developing world**. In doing so, we seek innovative responses to global and local challenges. In 2013, without warning we were told that state funding could be discontinued. Ongoing and scheduled projects and scholarships were under threat. Ultimately the funding was released after all.

But **the crisis taught us that the world of politics and research scarcely knew anything about us**.

It appeared to be a well-kept secret that Flemish universities and university colleges achieve very relevant things with partners in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

Conclusion: we had to come out into the open more and show that we do make a difference, together with the network of hundreds of researchers, professors, teachers and employees that are involved in VLIR-UOS projects. It's not only about the visibility of VLIR-UOS, but also the results and the impact of the cooperation.

In 2014 we launched a study to see how we can **support researchers to help them communicate more and better** about their research and its impact. We gave Lisa de Haardt the job of implementing the study.

We held interviews with researchers, communication departments and institutional coordinators for development cooperation. We looked through media databanks to see what international research made the news. This handbook presents what we learned, along with the tips we were given by those experts during the study day on 11 March 2015.



VLIR-UOS in action in 2013 at the Stakeholders Meeting of the Belgian Development Cooperation (photo: Jean-Michel Clajot)

Study day: 'Research: how do you get it out there?'

We organised a study day in Antwerp on 11 March for researchers and people involved in international projects. The goal was to motivate them to publicise their research and give them tips and tools that enable them to do that properly.

The results of the study were presented for the first time to the almost 150 people who attended; science journalist Koen Wauters shared with them the secrets of journalism and experts gave workshops on press releases, presentations, social media and more. The researchers were able to talk with the communication officers at their own institutions.



The study day attracted a big audience, which showed the need for more communication support for researchers (photo: Jesse Willems)

What's next?

The aim of this handbook is to provide researchers with support and encouragement to publicise their work more.

We expect to hold more communication-oriented study days in coming years together with interested partners.

And in the meantime we join forces with the communication departments and institutional coordinators for development cooperation at the universities and university colleges, and with you to help you publicise your work.



WHY PUBLICISE YOUR RESEARCH?

Four reasons not to publicise

Why do researchers sometimes not communicate to a wide audience? We asked them. We consolidated their answers into four reasons:

1. Not spectacular enough

'We are afraid that our research is not as spectacular as, say, The Flying Doctors.'

Professor Piet Pattyn, Ghent University

'My research is fairly fundamental and specific, which makes it hard to go public with attention-grabbing results.'

Researcher

"It's hard to anticipate simple questions that do not have simple answers."

2. No time

'When you add up all your input in communication, it is a big time investment.'

Professor Tom Brijs, Hasselt University

'Communication costs time and we already work at almost 200% to do research and raise funds.'

Researcher

3. Communication is not my business

'We want to communicate but we don't really know what we have to deliver and how we should approach it.'

Professor Jean-Pierre Van geertruyden, University of Antwerp

'It's hard to anticipate simple questions that do not have simple answers.'

Researcher

4. Journalists twist everything I say

'Journalists already have their story ready. If you don't give it to them they will go looking for it anyway. So it's better to learn how to convey it clearly yourself.'

'Journalists sometimes take your words completely out of context and then my message comes across wrong.'

Professor Miet Maertens, KU Leuven

Five reasons to publicise

The researchers who took part in the study said that it pays to communicate to the wider public. Their main reasons:

1. More support for your research (and more funding)

'Publicising your research always has a positive impact on your network, research and funding. You often don't see these results immediately and a significant time investment is needed, but there is always a pay-off.'

Professor Patrick Sorgeloos, Ghent University

'Credible publications + media attention = strong reputation.'

Researcher

'If you communicate professionally you can gain the trust of the citizen.'

Researcher

2. You widen your network

We strongly believe in communication, because it can be an accelerator to improve and expand your network and fundraising.'

Professor Tom Brijs, Hasselt University

3. Accountability

As a researcher you often make use of public resources or private funds. The people footing the bill are entitled to know where their money is going and what will be achieved.

'We have to publicise our research more. In the past we made the mistake of focusing solely on education and research, not on service. Ultimately, it is important that we are able to explain to citizens how we spend their tax money. It is our responsibility to communicate to a wide audience.'

Professor Patrick Sorgeloos, Ghent University

4. It provides satisfaction

Are you passionate about your research? If so, surely nothing beats telling everyone about it? Inspiring others is very satisfying.

'If we complete a successful project, it's very satisfying to share it with the general public.'

Professor Seppe Deckers, KU Leuven

5. You are not alone

Thankfully, you don't have to do everything yourself. You can get a great deal of help from your own institution, for instance.

'You can also share the work among different people, so the burden on one person is lightened.'

Professor Tom Brijs, Hasselt University



Professor Patrick Sorgeloos (Ghent University) speaks to the press in Vietnam (photo: Christophe Goossens)

WHAT STORIES END UP IN
NEWSPAPERS? WE INVESTIGATED

MEDIA INVESTIGATION

On the whole, the general public is not very interested in scientific research, never mind scientific research in far-flung foreign countries.

*This is also reflected in the media. International research projects often don't get any further than a well-intentioned press release. **We investigated which stories make the media and what factors drive success.***

We looked through the Flemish online Gopress databank for the period 2009-2014. This databank contains articles from 11 Flemish newspapers and 15 magazines, including Knack, Trends and Humo.

About the research method

The challenge was making a selection of articles on cooperation projects run by Flemish universities or university colleges with partners in Africa, Asia and Latin America. If we were to study all possible combinations of institutions, countries, project names and researchers, the list of results would be enormous. With that in mind, we searched for articles containing the terms 'VLIR-UOS', 'university development cooperation' and VLIR-UOS director 'Kristien Verbruggen'.

We ended up with 64 articles. We used this selection for our further analysis. It is a limited number, but it does give an idea of what subjects ultimately make the newspapers or magazines.

Of those 64 articles, 31 were about the activities of VLIR-UOS, especially about the financial uncertainty in 2013. If we take out those articles, we're left with 33 that tell us something about how projects that receive funding from VLIR-UOS are reported in the media.

What subjects are popular?

Health, water and food, and famous people are subjects that do especially well in newspapers and magazines. Famous people means government ministers, royals or individuals like Marleen Temmerman and Bill Gates.

Subject	Number
Famous people	10
Health	9
Water and food	7
Other	7

Which newspapers and magazines write about cooperation with the developing world?

In the media analysis we examined four projects closely to see which media the articles were published in.

These four projects were:

- **Nodding disease** (research into the cause)
- **The Walking Egg** (about infertility treatments in developing countries)
- **Apopo** (about the use of rats to detect landmines and TB)
- **Wilcard Tanzania** (Flemish biology students on a field trip in Tanzania)

A total of 178 articles were published on the four projects in the period 2009-2014:

Source	%
Regional newspapers	45%
Het Laatste Nieuws, Het Nieuwsblad	34%
De Morgen, De Standaard, De Tijd	15%
Other (Metro, Knack, ...)	6%

Many researchers dream of an article in De Standaard or De Morgen, but our study shows that regional newspapers are an undervalued channel. In fact, we note that the regional press gives a great deal of attention to International cooperation.

Why does an article not make the newspaper?

It is striking that the Belga press agency distributes a large number of articles about international research cooperation, but less than 1 in 3 is picked up by newspapers and magazines. What do we learn about the articles that are not published?

- Too many messages in one article.
- Lack of quotes, leading to abstract, impersonal articles.
- Unclear news value. The focus is on structures, subsidies and the functioning of the organisation.

What type of articles are published in which newspaper or magazine?

De Morgen/De Tijd		
Projects of professors	General VLIR-UOS	Mainly lots of short articles of no more than 300 words (informative)

De Standaard		
Political decisions	General VLIR-UOS	Articles of around 600 words on average

Regional newspapers, Het Laatste Nieuws en Het Nieuwsblad		
Projects of professors	Student projects (work placements, scholarships), PhD: human stories	These articles often include a photo and lots of quotes

Knack		
Projects of professors	Journalists reporting from a developing country	Long reports with a great deal of depth and visuals

“Press attention mainly has an impact on the visibility of your research. In that way companies, governments and academia get to know your work and appreciate it.”

Researcher

'YOUR STORY HAS TO HAVE A WOW FACTOR'

What is news?

'Your story has to have some sort of wow factor. There has to be something unexpected.' Koen Wauters shows a report from the TV news about potatoes in Texel. Researchers have managed to grow potatoes in salty ground. That opens up possibilities for using silted ground in developing countries for agriculture.

What's the news here? 'You get home to your mother, your father, your partner, your housemate, and you say, 'listen to this: in Texel they plant potatoes in salty ground. That's the news.'

Koen Wauters says that the target audience and the medium also determine whether something makes the news.

TARGET AUDIENCE

'When conveying your message it's important you know who your audience is. If you are working for a broad-based medium everyone needs to be able to understand your message.

For the TV news we have a general target audience. We want to reach everyone

We asked science journalist Koen Wauters (of the Belgian public broadcasting company VRT) to initiate us into the secrets of journalism. 'Journalist', just like 'scientist', is a catch-all term that covers a lot of different types of people, he explains. 'So I cannot give any assurances that everyone works like I do, but the main points are just about the same.'

Koen Wauters wants to teach researchers to think more like journalists and inspire them to tell their story. 'Because I'm sure there are still lots of stories I would like to tell, but I do not hear about because the researcher in question is not interested, is a little anxious or perhaps is not able to tell me.'

in Flanders who is interested in news. When I put a piece together I think about my 15-year-old son and my 75-year-old mother. They both need to find it interesting and to understand it.

“When I put a piece together I think about my 15-year-old son and my 75-year-old mother.”

My son knows a lot about technology, so I don't need to tell him what an app is, but my mother doesn't know what an app is. So I will have to tell her. You have to make sure that everyone can follow you.

Media that target the general public are most attractive to researchers who want to spread their message, because you reach the largest number of people and the response will be maximised.

Do not underestimate the importance of regional media. Take Radio 2. I've never had a researcher say to me: 'I'd like to get on Radio 2'. Radio 2 has regional programmes and an audience share that remains above 30%. So if you want to reach the most people in Flanders you go to Radio 2.'

THE MEDIUM

'TV only needs three things: pictures, pictures and pictures. And that's exactly where the difficulty lies for most scientists. What makes a story about potatoes in Texel so great? The pictures. You have a field

and you have potatoes. So the first thing TV journalists ask is: what can we show?

Radio is different. You cannot rewind when you listen to radio, so you have to make sure you simplify and clarify your message even more and that you repeat yourself so listeners can follow the narrative even if they miss a bit.'

How do you get your message to a journalist?

My first piece of advice is: drop by your institution's communication department. Communication departments can help you write a press release and make it accessible to a wide audience. They can also make an initial assessment of whether a certain subject has any chance.

There are a few options for spreading your message. You can send out a press release, hold a press conference or contact someone directly.'

PRESS RELEASE

'Make sure the news element is in the title or the first few sentences of your press release. If you email your press release, make sure the text is easy to read on all mobile devices, without requiring a lot of scrolling.'

“Do not underestimate the importance of regional media.”



Koen Wauters (right) in the recording studio
(photo: Koen Wauters)



When's the best time to send your press release? If it's not urgent you are better off waiting for a quiet period, like the holidays.

And what about the time of day? Every time has its own pros and cons. Send something in early in the morning, between 9 and 10 am and you could make the TV news at 1 pm. If you send it in the afternoon, the radio could use it, because by the end of the day they really need fresh news.

It's important that you are available when you send out your press release. Make sure your phone is switched on, the battery is full and you have plenty of time. There is nothing a journalist finds more frustrating than calling about an interesting story that has just come in and not getting through.'

“The first thing TV journalists ask is: what can we show?”

PRESS CONFERENCE

'A press conference is an option, but you have to be well-prepared. Make sure you have some news so that people turn up.

“My first piece of advice is: drop by your institution's communication department.”

Make sure you reserve enough time and understand that not everyone can do their work during a press conference that lasts half an hour or an hour. TV and radio journalists work to very tight deadlines. TV journalists want pictures fast. Newspaper journalists have less of a problem waiting for the end of the press conference to ask questions at their convenience. So make sure you give everyone enough time.

A coffee is sufficient. You will not attract people with biscuits, brunches and all that.'

CONTACTING A JOURNALIST

'A third option is directly contacting a journalist, someone you know and trust. If the journalist shows interest you know that your message will be carried by at least one newspaper, or get on TV or radio.'

"Who, what, where, how and why? Those are basically the only questions a journalist wants answered."

You could mix and match too. A classic approach is to give the TV news, say, the initial scoop before sending out a press release. Or tell your story to a newspaper journalist then immediately call the radio news department to say there might be an interesting story on the front page of tomorrow's paper. You could give an interview for broadcast next day. If you get your story in two ways there's also a bigger chance that others will follow.'

How do you tell your story?

'Who, what, where, how and why? Those are basically the only questions a journalist wants answered. Make sure you know what to say in advance. Use everything you have to explain – comparisons, pictures, photos, videos, anything.'

Visit village halls, Rotary clubs. Learn to address a wide audience. Learn to get your message across. As a researcher, you're steeped in scientific jargon. A journalist can help you translate that into everyday language, but it's a lot easier for the journalist if you can do that yourself.

Cut away all the fat. A TV news item lasts for between 90 seconds and two minutes. You haven't got time to give a comprehensive account, such as mentioning all institutional partners. You always need to reduce it to the bare essentials. And it's better for you to decide what's essential rather than the journalist.

The more you do it, the better you will become. Why do they often use the same people? Because they do it so well. And how come they are so good? Because they do it so often. So you just have to start doing it yourself.

Who do you do it for? For yourself and for your community. A lot of research is subsidised and is paid by public institutions. Parliament feels the

"It's better for you to decide what's essential rather than the journalist."

need to save money. I am convinced that a great deal of high-quality, sound, scientific research is done. Politicians that think so too will perhaps be less inclined to make spending cuts, which will ultimately benefit researchers.'

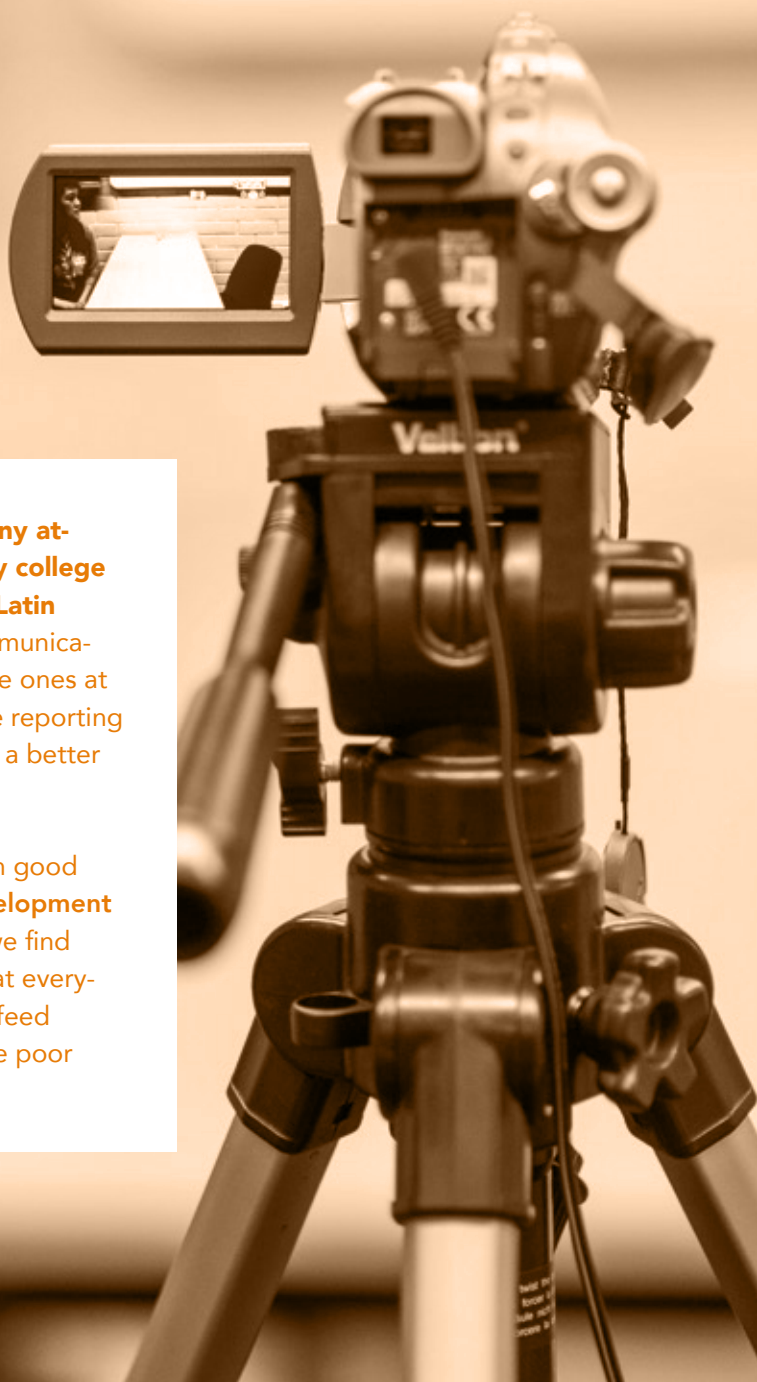
The passion of Koen Wauters

Koen Wauters is a science and health reporter for TV news programme Het Journaal. His passion is reporting science in a clear and attractive way to the general public. Everything from robotics to the Brout-Englert-Higgs mechanism by way of episiotomies. He used to be a radio news reporter. He started in journalism as science editor on KU Leuven's De Campuskrant.

HOW DO YOU GET INTO THE MEDIA?

The traditional media gives **hardly any attention to university and university college cooperation with Africa, Asia and Latin America**. That's a pity, because communication on international projects, like the ones at VLIR-UOS, can contribute to positive reporting about international cooperation and a better understanding of global challenges.

The VLIR-UOS partnerships are often good examples of a **modern form of development cooperation**. By working together we find solutions to shared challenges so that everyone wins. So it's not a one-way drip feed from the rich developed world to the poor developing world.



How do you ensure the media picks up your international research project?

1. Stress the relevance and impact of the research

How does your research make a difference? How does it offer a remedy to a social problem? Readers, viewers and listeners are mainly interested in the relevance and impact of what you have to say.

Knack published a number of articles about Ethiopia under the title '30 years after the famine: the environmental miracle in northern Ethiopia'. In the series, professor Seppe Deckers (KU Leuven) explains how scientific research has made a big difference.

2. Make your message newsworthy

Who doesn't like to hear about a trailblazing discovery? The media love them. But sometimes researchers don't dare to go public with research news. They cannot agree on a spokesperson or warn that the results have to be thoroughly checked first.

Even if it's not the breakthrough of the century, always try to say what makes your research so innovative.

When is something new? When it's different to what we already have.

Belgian infertility treatment conquers the world

Professor Willem Ombelet of Hasselt University has developed a method for treating infertile people for €200, rather than the several thousand euros you normally have to pay for such treatment. This offers a lot of opportunities for treating infertility in developing countries too.

To keep the problem in the public eye and help put the research into practice, professor Ombelet set up an organisation, The Walking Egg.

In recent years more than 600 articles have been published on the subject in newspapers and magazines, in Belgium and abroad. Despite all the media attention it remains a challenge for all involved to convince people of the need for affordable infertility treatments in developing countries.

What does The Walking Egg teach us?

> Start local

Give lectures in your own region. Appeal to organisations like Rotary and try to get your message across to as many people as possible in the clearest, most attractive way as possible. There is always someone who would like to work with you or fund the project.

> Do it professionally

Look for partners within your institution and beyond who can give you communication advice. Professor Ombelet works with the artist Koen Vanmechelen, who has created various works to visualise the project. These are now displayed, among other places, on the premises of the World Health Organization.

> Show patience

Your communication investment will often only start paying off over the long term. Be patient and don't allow yourself to get easily frustrated if nothing comes of it the first time.



Interview with professor Willem Ombelet in Ghana on infertility (photo: The Little Egg)



3. Choose one main message

All too often we don't want to miss anything out because everything is important. We find it hard to separate the essential stuff from the secondary stuff. But if we want the general public to understand our message it has to be clear and simple. So decide what your message is and drop everything that does not serve that message. If you try to spin lots of different plates you will be left to pick up the pieces.

During the media analysis **an article about a cooperation project with Mozambique** caught our eye. The Belgian press agency Belga sent out the article but other media did not pick it up. Why not? There were enough boxes ticked to attract the interest of Flemish journalists, including a Flemish celebrity as project coordinator.

We noted that the article conveyed several different messages

- The cooperation between Flanders and Mozambique
- The visit of the then Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters to Mozambique
- The health problems in Mozambique
- The partnership agreement between Flanders and Mozambique

The article would probably have been successful if it had focused on one problem – that Mozambique has just 863 doctors for a population of 22 million. And that those few remaining doctors are being recruited by international organisations and private hospitals. The article could have gone on to offer a solution based on the cooperation between Flanders and Mozambique.

4. Make the subject tangible, concrete and local

Make sure the target audience is able to link the subject to something they know.

Take the study into the impact of intensive coffee cultivation in Ethiopia. The title, 'Will we drink our last cup of coffee soon?', brings the study within the scope of our daily lives.

The more concrete you can make your message, the more attractive and clear it will be to readers, listeners and viewers. Provide examples that illustrate what you mean.

Make your subject local by linking it to your country. What does your country get out of the research or how does the problem affect us? What are local researchers doing out there? Why is your country getting involved?

5. Make sure your message is interesting

We often think we have to have been nominated for a Nobel Prize to be able to publicise our research abroad. Wrong. There's an interesting story behind every piece of research. Research is usually a journey full of twists, turns and surprises. The biggest discoveries in science were unexpected side effects or the result of mistakes.

Look for the story behind the data in your research. What were the pivotal moments? Your funniest anecdotes? Don't keep them to yourself.

“Communicate when you have something worthwhile to say. That need not be at the end of your research. How you get there is sometimes newsworthy enough.”

researcher

6. Make your story personal

Let the people involved in your project or those who benefit from it speak. What do they need and how will the research make a difference for them? Include direct quotes.

THE MOBILE REVOLUTION IN AFRICA

VPRO TV in the Netherlands ran a report on mobile phones taking Africa by storm. We met Emanuel, a disabled man who sells phone top-ups, showing how he makes a living from mobile technology. The report made much more of an impression on viewers than a bland report about research.

Emotion works. It gets people interested – don't shun it. Consider it as an aperitif to stimulate the appetite. After watching the video featuring Emanuel we want to know more about the underlying research.

Professor Mirjam de Bruijn of the African Studies Centre in Leiden studied the impact of mobile phones in Africa. The VPRO actually contacted her. Mirjam de Bruijn: 'They found me through the website.'

Did the report have any positive effects?

Mirjam de Bruijn: 'A lot of people mentioned it to me. Students also got in touch about research projects. The report helped me set up a new research project. That visibility reinforces your message. But you shouldn't think people are standing in line to give you bags of cash.'



Professor de Bruijn: 'Street children we photographed in the capital of Chad all wanted to have their pictures taken while on the phone.' (photo: Mirjam de Bruijn)

7. Scrap structures, subsidies and processes

A lot of articles about VLIR-UOS were published in 2013. That was the year the federal government gave to believe that subsidies would be cut back. Projects and scholarships would have been ended prematurely.

The articles on the crisis situation contain often-difficult terms and information on structures and the finances of VLIR-UOS. That might interest readers who know about VLIR-UOS already and are involved in a project, but it's not so interesting if you've never heard of the organisation before.

Concrete cases are the best way to talk about cooperation. In one of the articles a person from a developing country involved in a project explained what impact a VLIR-UOS project has. That gives the organisation a face and added value.

The same goes for complex structures within universities and university colleges. Certain sections or departments are important for the people involved but off-putting for readers.

8. Provide visuals

Newspapers or TV stations are sometimes prepared to send out a photographer or cameraperson in Flanders but not to a developing country. Make sure you have photos that say something about the relevance and impact of the research. Video footage can be useful for a TV interview.

If you want to provide them yourself see our photo and video tips elsewhere in this handbook. You could also hire a local professional photographer or cameraperson. There is a list of good local professionals in Africa, Asia and Latin America at africa-interactive.com.

Subjects that do well in the media

So what subjects do well in the media? And how can we incorporate them in our communication? We have drawn up a list of four subjects, based on a study by the European Commission and discussions with journalists and communication experts.

1. Famous people

In the media study we see that ministers and royals make the news easily, as do certain professors and artists.

Research projects with a link to a famous person do well in the media. We know Belgian professor Marleen Temmerman first and foremost as a former politician and as a gynaecologist. But she also gets a lot of attention for her research into reproductive health in Africa.

We primarily associate artist Koen Vanmechelen with the chickens that are central to his work. He worked with researchers of Hasselt University on The Walking Egg, a project to make infertility treatment affordable across the globe. The involvement of Koen Vanmechelen generated extra media attention.

Bram Govaerts found out that the support of a famous person can give your project a big lift. In 2013 the Belgian bio-engineer made the press at home and abroad when Bill Gates called him 'the future of agriculture'.

Even if no famous people are involved, you can always get in contact with someone to ask them what they think about the content and impact of your research. You can then use the quote in your press release. Young researcher Ludwin Poppe (Ghent University), for instance, was given enthusiastic praise by a renowned earth scientist for his thesis research in Ethiopia. By the way, the word 'renowned' can be enough to get people's attention.



Koen Vanmechelen (left) in Suriname (photo: Johan Swinnen)



Professor Marleen Temmerman (left) is involved in various university cooperation programmes (photo: Hans Van de Water)



Bill Gates (left) talking with Bram Govaerts (centre) (photo: Bram Govaerts)

Filipino Jovelyn Unay would have had to return to her homeland if the Belgian government had not freed up resources for scholarships (photo: Hans Van de Water)



2. Social problems and crisis

The greater the problem and the more urgent the need, the more interest it generates. The media love wars, floods and extramarital affairs. Does your research tick any of those boxes?

No one wants to hear about solutions to non-existent problems. Be clear about what problem you can solve with your research. 'But it's not that simple,' I hear you say, 'because the application of research is not usually the responsibility of the researcher but of the government, the private sector or NGOs.' That's true, but readers and viewers want to know what answers your research offers.

So always focus on the social problem you are looking to solve with your research or that your research can be applied to.

3. Politics

Politics is one subject that always makes the news. It's striking to note that the main subject of political reporting is the impact of specific decisions on citizens.

If you want to make the newspaper with your research you should focus on the impact of policy decisions. Our primary focus here is international research projects, so you can mention the policy of international institutions, such as the European Union or the United Nations. Or you could say that national policymakers also have an impact on international decision-making. For instance, show how certain decisions have a negative impact on population groups in the developing world.

In 2013 VLIR-UOS made the newspapers several times when arguing that the planned transfer of university development cooperation from the federal to the Flemish government was not desirable. The political decision was given a human face by letting Filipino scholar Jovelyn Unay speak for herself. Without support from the federal government she would have had to give up her studies at Vrije Universiteit Brussel and KU Leuven.

4. Health en education

Our media analysis shows that health and education are very successful subjects in the print press. If your research is in one of these areas you're in luck, because you have an advantage over competitors who will have to work a lot harder to get attention. If your subject is not in one of these areas, redouble your efforts to emphasise the newsworthiness and relevance of your research and look for a strong story.

Research into the zebra fish has made the media several terms in recent years, because it offers solutions for heritable diseases like cancer. Research in association with Flemish universities is also taking place in Ecuador and Suriname. The zebra fish is only interesting to a wide audience because of the connection to a social problem like cancer.

NODDING DISEASE: minister frees up one million after report

The Ebola crisis shows that health is a subject that makes the news very easily. The newspapers were full of it. But even a virtually unknown disorder like nodding disease caught the attention of a lot of viewers and readers in Belgium and the Netherlands.

Nodding disease, or nodding syndrome, is a neurological disorder associated with epileptic fits, cognitive decline and irreversible stunting. The disease primarily affects children aged between 5 and 15. Cases have been reported in southern (now South) Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda since 1960. Our knowledge about the development of the disease remains patchy.

Reporter Chris Michel went to South Sudan to see how serious the situation is there. We saw the shocking footage in the current affairs programmes *Terzake* in Belgium and *Nieuwsuur* in the Netherlands. One of the contributors is professor Robert Colebunders (University of Antwerp), who conducts research into the disease in partnership with colleagues in Uganda.



A shocking picture of a girl having an epileptic fit from a report by Chris Michel

The reports generated a flood of reactions in Belgium and the Netherlands. The Dutch minister for development cooperation Lilianne Ploumen made a million euros available for further research. Citizens set up a support committee to keep nodding disease in the news and the University of Antwerp collected extra funds for professor Colebunders's research.

Why did the nodding disease story make such an immediate impact in the media?

1. A mysterious disease is close to being solved thanks to Flemish research

Little is known about the disease. Flemish researchers have now discovered a possible cause, which is newsworthy. The fact that a Flemish researcher could perhaps provide a solution for a mysterious disease in Africa ensures that local factor.

Professor Colebunders has identified a possible cause of nodding disease
(photo: Bob Colebunders)



2. A story of suffering children and their families

The relevance of the research is immediately clear when you see pictures of children walking around like zombies. Their parents say that they are powerless. The story grabs viewers' imaginations. Suffering children touch every one of us.

3. Shocking images

The story is emotive because we see the children. Video footage can have a huge impact. So you should think about whether it would be worthwhile for your research project to get a professional video producer on board or to shoot some video yourself to motivate journalists to go out and visit your project.

In the case of nodding disease, Chris Michel combined various reporting assignments to pay for his trip to Africa. He shot project videos in DR Congo and Uganda for VLIR-UOS. Check the cost-sharing possibilities with the communication department of your own institution or at VLIR-UOS.

SUPPORT AND ASSISTANCE AT YOUR OWN INSTITUTION

We often forget how important it is to be known and enjoy support within your own institution. Not everyone is convinced or enthusiastic about international cooperation. So successful external communication starts with targeted internal communication.

‘Internal communication is important. They have to know you and your research, otherwise they cannot tell others about it.’

*Jan Dries, head of communication,
University of Antwerp*

It's also wise to join forces. Your own institution often has an interest in publicising your story. You're stronger together.

‘My advice? Learn to communicate in-house before you start any external communication.’

Researcher

THE COMMUNICATION DEPARTMENT

Every university and university college has its own communication and/or science communication department, which is constantly looking for interesting stories and research results it can publicise. The communication department also has a great deal of expertise on external communication and is also able to provide advice and training. In short, it's the ideal communication partner.



Sigrid Somers, KU Leuven's head of news, makes a presentation on her department at the study day (photo: Jesse Willems)

'The ties with the communication department are important because that gives us support to communicate with the outside world.'

Professor Gerrit Loots, Vrije Universiteit Brussel

In our research we focused primarily on the university communication departments. The communication departments at the university colleges are less oriented to supporting individual researchers. That is more of a task for the research departments.

What support can a communication department offer?

After you have approached the communication department with your proposal, you will work together to draw up a **communication plan**. You decide how, when and through which channels you publicise your research.

Does a **press release** need to be drafted? If so, the communication department will ask for some content.

Also use the **internal media channels**. Your story may be just right for your institution's in-house magazine or for social media. You will raise your profile in-house and ensure colleagues at other departments are aware of your expertise.

Would it be worthwhile **inviting a journalist** to visit a research project in a developing country? The communication department may decide to offer financial assistance if your case strengthens the institution's image.

Ask the communication department whether they can offer **non-financial support** by highlighting your research through, say, a staff quiz, a collection or an alumni event.

MAGAZINES OF THE FLEMISH UNIVERSITIES

Akademios (Vrije Universiteit Brussel)

Magazine University of Antwerp

Campuskrant (KU Leuven)

Magazine Hasselt University

Durf Denken (Ghent University)



WILDCARD TANZANIA MAKES BIOLOGY HOT

Every two years professor Herwig Leirs arranges a tropical field trip for biology students at the University of Antwerp. The Flemish students go to Tanzania for three weeks to conduct research together with Tanzanian students.

In 2008 the field trip caught the attention of the communication department of the University of Antwerp. They managed to persuade the well-known poet Ramsey Nasr to follow the students in Tanzania with a professional TV team.



Poet Ramsey Nasr interviews a biology student in Tanzania (photo: Hans Van de Water)

The result was a five-part series Wildcard Tanzania on Canvas and Ramsey Nasr's book *Homo Safari-cus*.

The investment paid off, because the big viewing figures translated into a striking increase in the number of enrolments to the biology course. Professor Leirs enlarged support for his research, both in his own institution and elsewhere.

'If we had not had such close relations with the communication department, we might never have had this chance,' says professor Herwig Leirs.

What's the best way to approach the communication department?

1. Make yourself known

If you want support from your communication department you should make sure they know you and your research. Give them a succinct summary of your research and update them when you have new findings.

2. Show your drive

The communication department often does not have the time to read all PhD and research papers, so it is very important that you propose your project as attractively as possible, with conviction and enthusiasm. If you don't show that drive, your project could get lost in the noise.

3. Give yourself plenty of time

Tell the communication department about your communication plans as early as possible, so that they can reserve time.

4. Be tenacious

Don't give up if you are rejected the first time. Sometimes a communication department can have a heavy workload or may have just invested in another project. Take their feedback to heart, improve your proposal and give it another go later down the line.

THE INSTITUTIONAL COORDINATORS FOR DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

Flemish universities and university colleges have institutional coordinators for development cooperation, abbreviated to ICOS. These people are the link between researchers and those who fund international projects, such as VLIR-UOS.

They are experts in international projects, so they can support you in your efforts to publicise your research projects in a developing country.

What an ICOS can do specifically:

- Bring you into contact with the communication department of your institution;
- Help you write a press release;
- Give you advice on research funding.

Visit www.vliruos.be/en/icos for a list of institutional coordinators for development cooperation.

TAKING A JOURNALIST TO ETHIOPIA: 'YES, IT'S WORTH IT'

Professor Seppe Deckers (KU Leuven) has taken a journalist to Ethiopia on two separate occasions, thanks to the close working relationship with the institutional coordinator for development cooperation (ICOS) and VLIR-UOS.

You usually pay the journalist's travel costs yourself. As well as air travel, visa, hotel and meals, you'll also have to pay for photo and video permits, and in some cases you'll need special equipment, if you want to film in a humid environment, for instance. If the journalist is able to take photos you will save on the costs of a separate photographer or cameraperson.

Seppe Deckers: *'KU Leuven contributed to the costs of the journalist thanks to the assistance of the ICOS. But the costs of an article are nothing compared with its reach and impact.'*

Basically, you don't have any say over what the journalist produces, as that's covered by freedom of the press.

What did the collaboration with the journalist deliver?

Seppe Deckers: *'Ultimately it resulted in four articles, published in Knack among other places. Thanks to the media attention this generated, the organisation Ondernemers voor Ondernemers*

is now going to Ethiopia with us for the fourth time and sponsoring local spin-offs there. The reports in the press have got us noticed. You make it interesting for everyone when you present the subject to the general public in an accessible way.'

Plus the media attention contributed to the establishment of the Ethiopia work group at KU Leuven. And other partners, such as the university college Thomas More, have been persuaded to launch projects in Ethiopia.



Professor Deckers (centre): 'There are spectacular eco improvements in the region and agricultural production has increased significantly.' (photo: Wannes Verbeeck)



Journalist Chris De Stoop (centre) on a reporting assignment in Ethiopia (photo: Seppe Deckers)



Communication officer Hans Van de Water shows the VLIR-UOS annual report with stories from research projects (photo: Jesse Willems)

THE VLIR-UOS COMMUNICATION DEPARTMENT

VLIR-UOS is delighted to publicise successful projects and tell people how they make a difference. We are always on the lookout for interesting cases for the newsletter, the website and the annual report. We also invite researchers to present their case at events, such as the annual new year event.

Do you have a compelling story to tell about cooperation with the developing world? Send an email to hans.vandewater@vliruos.be to tell us about it. Even if it's just an idea, let us know. Let us decide whether we can do anything with it.

See www.vliruos.be/communication for more tips for holding interviews and taking photos in the developing world. You can also download logos for your communications about VLIR-UOS projects.

If you need communication support or you have any questions, get in touch. We will be able to help you or put you in touch with the appropriate expert.

THE BASIC INGREDIENTS OF EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

Imagine, you get up in the morning and you open your wardrobe. What are you going to wear? Your choice will depend on what you have planned and who you are meeting. You probably won't go for the washed-out T-shirt if you're scheduled to present your research proposal to the expert jury.

Communication works in the same way. You need to answer a few questions before selecting your communication channel:

- **What do I want to achieve?**
- **Who am I addressing?**
- **What do I want to say?**

Once you've answered those questions you can make the right choice. Because there is no such thing as a one-size-fits-all message for every target group and every goal.



GOAL: Don't shoot with your eyes closed

Think before you act. The first step in your communication is to ask yourself what you want and from whom. The message you convey and the communication channel you choose depend on the answers to these questions. **Communication without a properly defined goal is like taking a penalty with your eyes closed.**

Communication can have lots of very different goals: do you want to inform, convince or inspire? Or do you want to get your target group to take action? Perhaps you want to raise additional funds.

Adapt your message to your goal. Make sure your target group understands exactly what you expect.



TARGET GROUP: you don't start a love letter with 'To whom it may concern'

Adapt your message to your target group. After all, you approach experts in your field a lot differently from a group of school-children.

Ken Haemer says that putting together a presentation without having a clear target group in mind is like starting a love letter 'To whom it may concern'. That's not going to get you anywhere. It holds for all forms of communication, not just presentations.

Once you've defined your target group you need to answer the following questions:

1. Why do they already know?

We often wildly overestimate the knowledge that our target group has. You are better off saying too much than too little. Take DNA. The experts know what it is, but for the general public you are better off explaining the term, because otherwise you risk them not following the rest of your argument.

2. What language do they speak?

Speak the language of your target group. You don't have to be down with the kids, but you should take due account of the education and age of your target group. Always be wary of too many abbreviations and jargon.

Consider the Belgian journalist who asked the academic to use the Dutch word 'doctoraat' rather than the English term 'PhD' early in their TV interview. We forget that the general public is not always familiar with some terms we use on a daily basis.

3. What are their concerns?

You have to get the attention of your target group, so it's best to talk about things that your target group finds relevant. How can you make the connection between your research and the lives of the people you are targeting?

Well, for instance, when talking about your research into hypertension in Uganda you can refer to the situation in Belgium. You can mention the risks of high blood pressure and the treatments available to patients here. And you can compare the numbers of hypertension patients in Uganda and Belgium.





MESSAGE: clear and convincing

Once you've defined your goal and your target group, you can start working on your message.

If you wanted your target group to remember just one thing, what would it be? Everything you say or write should be oriented to that one thing.

'We all need to put more time and effort in translating scientific messages in simple words for the larger public.'

Researcher

Getting attention and making yourself understood

Most people do not particularly care about what we have to say, so we have to work hard to get the attention of our target group and convey a clear message.

GET YOUR TARGET GROUP INTERESTED

How do you get people's attention? We have already talked about what the media find important: disasters, celebrities and novelties. Try to pique your target group's attention.



Dutch researcher Bart Knols found a way to grab people's attention for his malaria mosquitos. He presented his research in bed in his underpants at TEDxMaastricht. It paid off, because journalists were soon phoning for interviews.

DARE TO BE DIFFERENT

Have the courage to differentiate yourself from the rest. Make unexpected connections or comparisons that people understand to explain your research.

The title of an article about building ICT capacity in Cuba was 'What if Google was down?'. System administrators often use Google to find solutions to problems. Imagine you had to repair a server and internet was down for three days. What would you do? That's what the article was about. People are more likely to read the article because Google is mentioned in the title.

Mosquito expert Bart Knols cites a 2014 article in Dutch newspaper De Volkskrant titled 'Wanted: the Dutch Bill Gates'. We weren't able to find the article ourselves, but the title is a great example of how to get people's attention by playing smart. Bart Knols was looking for a big Dutch backer of the calibre of Bill Gates. And he had the perfect title to grab people's attention.

KEEP IT SIMPLE

Albert Einstein once said: 'If you can't explain it simply, you don't understand it well enough.' Scientists are often fearful of explaining their complex research in a simple way. But an abstract message that is hard to grasp will always fall flat on its face. Trying to explain your research to your partner, your child or a neighbour is good practice. Keep trying until they get it.

'Try to convey your message as simply as possible to as many people as possible.'

Professor Willem Ombelet, Hasselt University

BRAM GOVAERTS' FERRARI

Researcher Bram Govaerts explained what he does in clear terms in an interview broadcast on TV station Vier: 'We ensure there is no food problem by working on maize and wheat (...).' And rather than using the difficult abbreviation of his organisation, CIMMYT, he says: 'I work for the International Centre for Maize and Wheat'.

They cross-fertilise seeds at CIMMYT. Bram Govaerts: 'We try to find the best mum and dad, so that a brilliant child is produced.' Clear and simple. Not for a scientific conference, but for the general public.



Bram Govaerts speaks with the Mexican press (photo: CIMMYT)

But Bram Govaerts also notes that having the right seeds is not enough. He uses a metaphor to get this across: 'It's like having a beautiful Ferrari and not knowing how to drive. You're not going to get much out of it. So you need farmers who know how to use the seeds.'

You don't just come up with things like that on the spot. A well-prepared researcher has a clear advantage. So build up a stock of metaphors and strong quotes for interviews.

From problem to solutions

When researchers talk about their project they often forget to say why they are doing it. What is the problem they want to solve? It's all about the relevance of the research.

You need a problem-solving structure to give shape to your message. We can pinpoint the problem and identify the solution by answering a few questions.

PROBLEM

- What is the problem?
- Who has the problem?
- Why does the problem exist?
- What causes the problem?

SOLUTION

- What is the solution?
- What contribution does the research project make to the solution?
- What does the research project do in concrete terms?
- How can the research project results be applied to solve the problem?

NEWSPAPER, TV, FACEBOOK OR VILLAGE HALL?

So you've identified your goal, your target group and ways to bring your message into sharper focus. Now it's time to choose the right communication medium.

It's an important choice, because certain channels are better suited to certain goals or target groups. And your message will differ somewhat, depending on the medium you choose.

If you're talking about your research you won't normally get away with just one channel. **It's better to address your target group through more than one channel.**

‘Gather your messages together and use those internal and external channels that are already available. By conveying your message in a targeted way you will gradually create a community. Make sure that your messages are consistent and focus on quality.’

Jan Dries, head of communication, University of Antwerp



Foto: CCAFS-CIMMYT

Approach each channel differently

Adapt your message to suit the channel. Don't write one press release for use in the various channels. Each channel needs a different approach.

Let's look at some examples:

NEWSPAPERS

Make sure your message has current news value and is succinct. Grab people's attention.

RADIO OR TV INTERVIEW

Make a connection between your expertise and a current affairs item.

SOCIAL MEDIA

These include Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Pinterest. They demand a personal approach. Show people the work behind the scenes. Create a community and add regular posts.

LECTURES FOR CLUBS, COMPANIES AND SO ON

Speaking to groups creates possibilities for fund-raising, participation and awareness-raising. Use tangible examples to illustrate your work.

‘We enlarge our network and may motivate new sponsors by speaking at Rotary evenings.’

- Professor Gerrit Loots, Vrije Universiteit Brussel

I was asked to give a short talk on Ethiopia at the African Film Festival. These lectures on our project activities are very important ways of raising awareness and enlarging the network.’ - Professor Seppe Deckers, KU Leuven.

Earned, owned or paid media?

EARNED MEDIA

Examples of earned media are newspapers, TV and radio. You are invited to contribute as an expert based on your research. In an interview you mostly talk about a current issue or explain an exceptional result.

- > **Pro:** It doesn't cost anything and they are highly credible.
- > **Con:** You cannot steer the content, because the chief editor takes the decisions.

OWNED MEDIA

These are media run by the institution or research group. They include websites, blogs, folders, brochures, newsletters and social media pages.

- > **Pro:** You decide what you say and how.
- > **Con:** You are responsible and it demands an investment of time and money.

To be able to spread your message through your institution's communication channels you first need to get your research known internally.

PAID MEDIA

Here you pay for time or space to spread your message in the form you prefer. This may involve paying for an article or hiring a journalist to report on your research in the developing world.

- > **Pro:** You get attention in the media and you largely decide how the message is conveyed.
- > **Con:** The success of your article or report depends on the medium. It often requires a large investment.

'We paid for an article in International Innovation to prepare the ground for our research.'

Professor Jean-Pierre Van geertruyden,
University of Antwerp

'We try to actively participate through social media. We have a Facebook group, which we try to generate sufficient content for. Road safety is a subject that is well suited to this channel.'

Professor Tom Brijs, Hasselt University



Interview on Surinamese TV about cooperation with Flemish universities (photo: Wim Van Petegem)

10 TIPS FROM THE EXPERTS





Press releases

TEN TIPS FROM PETER DE MEYER, PRESS SPOKESPERSON
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ANTWERP

A good press release is essential if you wish to make your research and your results known to a wide audience. Journalists rarely have the time or the expertise to struggle all the way through a scientific paper or PhD thesis without help. They are so pushed for time that it is unrealistic to expect them to attend a whole conference and produce a cogent article or report at the end of it. Journalists are better served by press releases they can use immediately.

1. Limit your press release to a single A4 (approximately 400 words)

It's not easy to boil your paper or thesis down to a single page but it is absolutely necessary. Cut it down to the essence. Make clear decisions: cramming in seven or more messages is counterproductive. So, a press release is not a factual summary of your research.

2. Think up an eye-catching title

Journalists receive dozens of press releases every day. They have to make choices. Figures always do well. Complicated or meaningless titles often trigger the reflex to delete.

3. Grab the reader's attention at the start

If your title gets one foot in the door, your introduction could get both feet under the table. Take three or four short sentences to explain what you have studied, what you found and why it makes any difference.

4. Steer well clear of complex scientific terminology

You're very familiar with scientific words and terms, but they are double Dutch to the uninitiated. Have a non-expert read your press release rather than a colleague.

5. Keep your sentences simple

A sentence with three subclauses might be grammatically correct (or worse: it might not be) but it will not be any fun to read. The passive voice is a huge turnoff, so try to use the active voice as much as possible: 'Jan Janssens studied the water quality of the river Scheldt' beats 'The water quality of the river Scheldt was studied by Jan Janssens' hands down.

6. Focus on news value

A press release usually has to be newsworthy. So the 'news' in your press release should be prominently placed. If what you have to say is not very newsworthy, your press release can still be worthwhile if the subject of your research has a lot of social relevance at that moment.

7. Leave things out

This might sound wrong, but if there are fourteen proofs to back up an argument, ignore ten of them. Long enumerations kill a reader's appetite, make a text hard to read and a journalist will not keep them all anyway. If you do provide fourteen you leave it to the journalist to choose the most important and the journalist might choose the wrong ones.

Peter De Meyer: 'Leave things out in your press release' (photo: Jesse Willems)



8. Try to make connections to current affairs

You won't always manage it, but you may be able to use an event in the news to make the subject of your press release more relevant. A fictive example: if your PhD deals with a mysterious disease and you know that a famous sportsperson was laid low by that disease for some time, you should mention that in your press release. It will give the reader a point of reference.

9. Include direct quotes

Every article, however short, has at least one direct quote. You might find it strange, but be sure to quote yourself or a colleague once or twice in a text. A quote gives a text more credibility. You have to write your press release in the style of a newspaper article.

10. Who needs a thousand words when you have a picture

A picture or a strong graphic always deserves a place in your press release. It helps you keep down your word count and get your message across.

Ten tips to help you write a good press release. Still not totally ready? Remember that you can always get assistance from the communication department at your institution. You can work together to produce something you're happy with and decide when to put it out and who to send it to. Good luck!



Presentations

TEN TIPS FROM TOON VERLINDEN OF THE FLOOR IS YOURS

Think presentations are intrinsically boring and hard to follow? Think again. Here are some tips to help you create impactful research presentations.

1. Never use more than 20 words per slide

That will force you to be succinct. If you put less text on your slides you'll move your audience's attention away from your slides and towards what you're saying. This tip is easy to remember and easy to implement. If you do one thing, do this.

2. Know your audience

Who will you be talking to? What do they care about? What do they know already? A presentation that is not adapted to the audience will often be a waste of time. For everyone.

3. Know your key message and repeat it

Decide in advance what you want your presentation to achieve. Do you want to inform? If so, what information do you want to convey? Do you want to get people to act? If so, what do you want them to do? Repeat your key message at least twice during your presentation.

4. Show some enthusiasm

If you're not inspired by your presentation, why would your audience be?

5. Practice

Practice makes perfect – or at least it will make you a little less nervous when you take the stage for real. You will know how much time you need to get everything across and you will know where the weaknesses are. It's better to know them before you have an audience hanging on your words.

6. Give bullets the bullet

Lots of people lazily pile lots of text on a slide in bullet form. The slide soon looks like a crime scene. Dead words everywhere. And they forget that an audience will have read the slide before they finish the first point. Conclusion: Kill your darlings or they will murder your message!

7. Use presenter view

Afraid you'll forget your lines if you don't put it all on the slide? Use presenter view. You can write everything down in the form of notes, which only you can see. In PowerPoint click 'View' and click 'use presenter view'.

8. It's not about the data, it's about what the data tell us

Only use data that are relevant to your presentation. If you have a whole table, but you only want to talk about two items, delete everything but those two items.

9. Slides and handouts are not the same

Slides are there to support your presentation, while handouts have to be able to stand on their own. If your slides need no further comment, why bother turning up?

10. Remember: never use more than 20 words per slide

That's two tips in one: never use more than 20 words per slide and know your key message and repeat it.

Contact: toon@thefloorisyours.be

For more presentation tips and a free e-book on presentations, visit thefloorisyours.be/en.



Leen De Coninck (Artevelde University College) makes a PechaKucha presentation during the VLIR-UOS new year's event (photo: Jean-Michel Clajot)



TV or radio interviews

TEN TIPS FROM JEROEN WILS OF BEPUBLIC

Most researchers prefer to make a run for it as soon as a camera or microphone appears. That's a pity, because a radio or TV interview can often reach a wide audience. So how do you make sure you make a good impression and your message sticks? Follow these tips.

TV INTERVIEWS:

1. Body language: convey dynamism and confidence

Never fold your arms or hide them behind your back. Use them to add power to your words. Orient your body and your head to the interviewer, who is often standing right next to the camera, to ensure you are facing the lens. Try to limit distracting facial expressions like blinking and smiling during the interview.

2. Clothes and look: check yourself in the mirror first

Think about your outfit. Soft colours create a soft look and pinstripes or checks can cause problems on TV. Also check your clothing, face and hair before going in front of the camera.

3. Check the background, because the camera sees everything!

Choose a plain, businesslike background. A subtle logo or corporate ID is recommended. Always check behind you before the camera starts rolling! Check for logos or signs from previous meetings that could suggest the wrong context.



A EURANET journalist interviews VLIR-UOS scholar Pauline Kibui (photo: Hans Van de Water)

TV AND RADIO:

4. Give sound bites

A quote should not last more than 20 seconds. Practice boiling your message down into short standalone sound bites. The journalist will select two quotes, so never say things like 'as I just said...', 'to repeat what I just said...' or 'that's right...'. If you stumble over your words, start again. The goal is to provide perfect sound bites.

5. Keep it snappy

Prepare every interview very carefully. Choose no more than three messages and keep repeating them. That will prevent the journalist focusing on a less important argument or matter. Your prime concern is providing a strong sound bite that contains your key message. Stay in control of your own interview!

6. Facts, opinions and interpretations

We expect experts to give us facts, but also opinions and interpretations. So don't limit yourself to information. Tell us what it means and – if possible – what you feel the right response is.

7. Kick out the jargon

Assume the person you are speaking to is a 14-year-old with no understanding of your subject. You only have one shot at that 14-year-old, so you have to get your message across in a clear and understandable way. Try to speak at a measured pace and boil everything down to the essence.

8. Express your message clearly and unambiguously, focusing on its news value

Don't leave your message open to interpretation. Make sure you flesh it out: back it up with hard data and expert analysis. Use practical examples to bring it to life, make it clear and credible. Try to give the journalist a piece of news.

9. The studio interview: rules of the game

State your most important message straight away and repeat it towards the end. A studio interview lasts 3-5 minutes. Prepare well so that you can handle unexpected questions. Listen to the questions and give pertinent answers to create a conversation rather than a monologue.

RADIO INTERVIEWS:

10. No pictures: speak as clearly as you can

The listener cannot see you and has no further context, so give even more attention to your message to ensure it is clear. Articulate precisely without sounding wooden. If you're interviewed over the phone, don't have your mouth too close to the device to prevent undesirable sounds being picked up.

Contact: Jeroen@bepublic.be

For more information on media training, social media workshops and public speaking, visit www.bepublic.be



Photos

TEN TIPS FROM PHOTOGRAPHER JESSE WILLEMS

The right picture can make your research a lot more attractive and help you reach the right target group. These ten tips will help you get it.

1. The first rule of photography: be there

This might seem obvious, but if you don't get there on time or you don't have your camera ready you could miss the very picture your research is crying out for. Think about taking photos in advance, rather than as an afterthought when your research is basically all done and dusted or when almost everyone has left after that important conference.

2. Cut out the noise. Focus on the melody

Many fledgling photographers tend to want to say too much in one picture. That only leads to your key message being drowned out. Choose your subject and forget about anything else. Focus on what's important and ignore the rest.

3. Don't put your subject in the middle – generate vitality

As every child knows, you have to read a comic strip like a text. From left to right. The same goes for photos. If you put your subject in the middle of the frame (along the horizontal or vertical axis) your photo will lack energy. Always place your subject off-centre, be that slightly to the left or to the right, nearer the bottom or the top – the rule of thumb is two-thirds off centre.

4. You take the photo, not your camera

Don't allow yourself to be demoralised by your colleague's big expensive camera. The person behind the viewfinder is usually more important than the gear. You can even take good pictures with a smartphone nowadays. Be sure to take your task seriously and to make optimal use of your device. Learn what it can do to avoid disappointment.

5. Not everything needs to be in sharp focus on a clear photo

If you know exactly what your perspective is, you should opt to focus only on your subject. When you use a larger diaphragm only that subject will be in focus, the background will be blurred, which draws less attention from your subject. An additional advantage is that a smaller diaphragm produces less noise or blur due to movement.

6. Small subjects become larger when you make yourself smaller

Say you are studying plants. They will look a lot better when you photograph them from their point of view. Try taking a picture of a flower standing up and then lying down. You'll soon see that you can take a really impressive photo if you make yourself smaller compared with your subject.

7. Use a tripod in dark conditions

A large amount of research is conducted in dark conditions. If little natural light is available, using a tripod can help. You will have less problems with shaky hands, which will allow you to choose a longer exposure time.

8. Use the display on your camera

Most modern cameras come with a display that shows you exactly how your photo will look. If you are not very well acquainted with your camera the display will give you a better idea of how your photo will look than the viewfinder. Do be aware that your camera will be less stable when you hold it in front of you than when you bring it up to your eye.

9. Don't touch up too much

That Instagram filter might look fantastic right now, but when you look at your research photos again in a couple of years, you'll probably think the filter makes them look dated. Only do a basic touch-up. Sharpening focus, straightening it up and perhaps upping the light will mostly do the job.

10. If you find the perfect photo elsewhere, don't use it without permission

Photos, like music, are protected by copyright. Photos normally have a credit with an address to contact the photographer. If you like a photo, ask the photographer for permission, explaining what you want to use it for. That can save you a lot of unexpected costs later down the line.

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Professor Jean Poesen (KU Leuven) takes a photo on a research project in Uganda (photo: Herman Diels)



Scientific posters

TEN TIPS FROM TOON VERLINDEN OF THE FLOOR IS YOURS

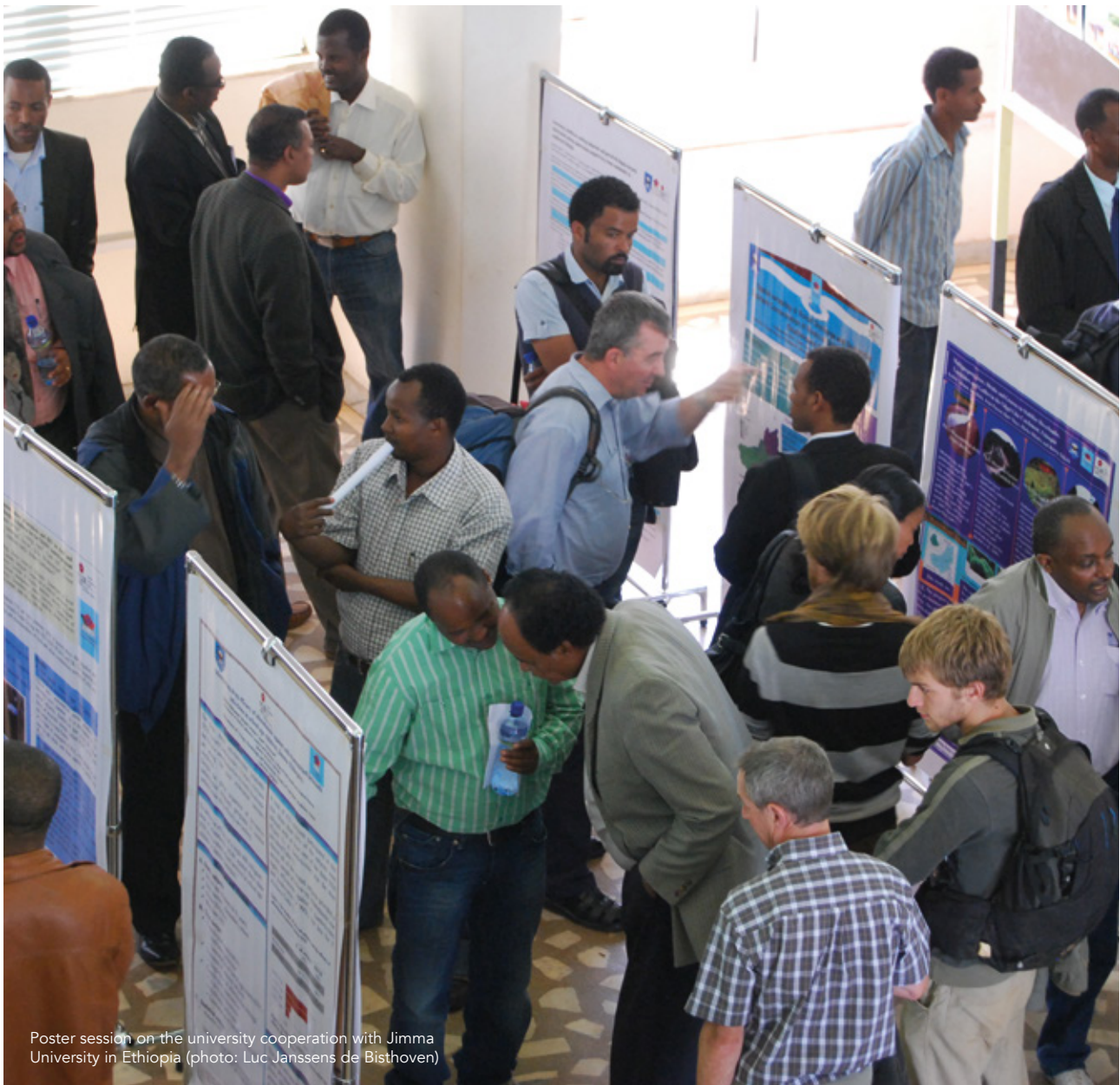
Every researcher will make a poster at some time. How do you make sure it makes the right impact? Follow these tips.

1. What is your elevator pitch?

You have to get your message across in 15 seconds. Do some tests first. There are dozens of posters vying for attention alongside your own. Yours has to be more relevant, more instant and more attractive than all of them.

2. Know your key message

Decide in advance what you want your poster to achieve. Do you want to inform? If so, what do you want to convey? Do you want to get people to act? If so, what do you want them to do? The people who see your poster will only remember one thing: what do you want it to be? Your key message should be written large on your poster.



Poster session on the university cooperation with Jimma University in Ethiopia (photo: Luc Janssens de Bisthoven)

3. Use big, attractive photos

Photos grab our attention first. Make sure they are in a high enough resolution and avoid clichés. Find rights-free photos at compfight.com. Search for photos with the creative commons label or buy from websites like www.snapwi.re or shutterstock.com

4. Choose an attractive slogan

Don't use the title of your paper for your poster. A slogan has to be snappy, eye-catching and if possible short. Make sure it's in big letters and easy to read.

5. Make your message relevant

You have to persuade people to look at you. Otherwise they'll just look somewhere else. Why are you so important? What's in it for them? If you know, spell it out.

6. Structure your message

Split your poster into three sections (two is even better) and throw out anything that does not fit anywhere. This will ensure your poster remains easy to 'read' and not too full.

7. Always use captions or a key for photos, figures and tables

The first thing people look at is the picture and the caption. They rarely read all the copy. So make sure your caption provides important information.

8. Stand next to your poster

If at all possible, physically stand next to your poster. A poster does not have to be just a piece of paper on the wall. Could you perhaps reinforce it with something else? Like an experiment setup or an object that makes people think? It will get you more attention and you'll create more interest.

9. Use colour contrasts

Don't have black letters on a dark-blue background. Go for a clear, white or pastel background with black or at least dark letters for the main meat of your text.

10. Stand on the shoulders of giants

Look at what others have done and learn from that. A good place to start is the website of the University of Nottingham. They hold an annual science poster competition as part of their Research Showcase.

Contact: toon@thefloorisyours.be

Find more tips in the free online poster course at thefloorisyours.be/en.



Social media

TEN TIPS FROM SOFIE VERKEST OF THE SCIENTIFIC COMMUNICATION DEPARTMENT OF VRIJE UNIVERSITEIT BRUSSEL

You'll know about social media like Facebook, YouTube, LinkedIn and Twitter. Social media are highly interactive websites and applications. People use them to talk to each other about things that interest them. They are usually looking for people who think like they do and hold similar values.

Social media are often very up to date, because they attract a large number of consumers and there's always someone who has something new to share. The content posted on social media can almost always be easily shared within a network. That means they are very well adapted to the fast creation of viral phenomena and buzz.



Sofie Verkest: 'Flesh out your profile' (photo: Johan Swinnen)

1. Quality beats quantity every time

Start small, choose one or two social networks and concentrate on them by posting quality.

2. Plan ahead

Make a schedule of posts at the start of the month to create routine and save time.

3. Flesh out your profile

That looks more professional and lets people know exactly who you are, what you stand for and why they should like you or follow you.

4. Tell people you're on social media

If you have a Facebook page or Instagram account you're proud of shout it from the rooftops! Make sure your social media addresses are clearly stated on your website, in your email signature, on your posters, postcards and course materials.

5. Offer something extra

Make sure your social media channels offer your followers or fans added value. They are the ideal media for giving away exclusive extras or prizes in connection with a special event or a conference.

6. Post for your target group not for yourself

It's not about what you want to say, but what your target group wants to hear.

7. Use visuals

Photos and videos are staples of social media. Never post anything on Facebook without a picture.

8. Make sure you have a good balance of personal and professional information

Social media are more personal than other media. Use them to give a peek behind the scenes at your lab, in your department or a lecture you give.

9. Check out how other people are doing it

Are others in your field doing particularly good online? What's their secret? Keep an eye out for good examples and learn from them!

10. Analyse your work

Check your Facebook statistics from time to time and identify which posts did well and which did not. There are similar ways of monitoring how many visitors you attract and what they get up to on your site on other social media sites.

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The Expertise Centre, Science Communication Brussels brings science to the masses in events, social media and educational projects

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Video

TEN TIPS FROM LUC VERBEECK OF TROPICAL

Unfortunately there's only one way to learn how to make a video – by making a video. The good news is that creativity is welcome, together with a healthy measure of intuition. Follow our tips for making a good video.

1. Decide what you want to say

Start by asking yourself what you want to tell people. That will be the basis of your video.

2. Decide what type of video you want to make

Do you want an information film, a short, a report of an event or something else? The preparation depends on the type of video you choose.

3. The elevator pitch

This is a helpful concept from the marketing industry to help you get your thoughts in order: you have about a minute – the average elevator ride – to explain what you want to make.

4. Do not zoom

Do not zoom while you're shooting and make sure there are no distractions in the frame, such as fire extinguishers.

5. Headroom and line of sight

Give these two technical concepts sufficient attention when recording interviews. Make your frame before you press record and cut your subjects at the wrists if you cannot fit them in completely.

6. The golden ratio

The golden ratio is a rule that is easy to explain but leaves a lot of room for interpretation: cut the picture into nine equal sections in your mind with two horizontal and two vertical lines. Compose the picture such that the most important subject is located at one of the intersections of those lines.

7. Think ahead

Film more than you need and use the cuts to resolve any editing problems. And use a tripod wherever possible!

8. Axis

Unless you have artistic ambitions, rely on the axis and your intuition. The rule is that you should have all movement or action on the same side of the frame. So a car will always move from left to right if the camera always shoots from the same side of the road. If you don't do this, the same car will suddenly be shown going in the opposite direction and the viewer will feel that something's not quite right.

Another typical example is a football match, where you draw an imaginary line from one goal to the other. If the cameras are all set up on one side of the line each team will always be attacking one end in the first half. In the second half they switch ends, of course.

9. Shoot good footage

Even good editors are not magicians. They cannot turn poor footage into a good video. You can compensate a little to make the whole experience less painful, but you'll only really end up putting lipstick on a pig.

10. Be aware

However proud you may be of your work of art, be aware that the viewer only cares about the end result and has no concern for or knowledge of the time you've invested or the problems you've had. You have been warned.

Contact: luc@tropical.be

For more information, visit www.tropical.be



Luc Verbeeck: 'Start by asking yourself what you want to tell people.' (photo: Hans Van de Water)

And now, get to work!

Be sure to tell us how you publicise your research:
hans.vandewater@vliruos.be

ABOUT VLIR-UOS

VLIR-UOS supports partnerships between universities and university colleges in Flanders (Belgium) and the South looking for innovative responses to global and local challenges.

VLIR-UOS funds cooperation projects between professors, researchers and teachers. VLIR-UOS also awards scholarships to students and professionals in Flanders and the South. Lastly, VLIR-UOS helps to strengthen higher education in the South and the globalisation of higher education in Flanders.

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