

Storytelling in Academia: How to Reduce Its Risks in Research Narrative

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Rigorous academia narrative and high-impact storytelling are poles apart. Translating complex data into attention-grabbing and accessible stories is not something that many can do intuitively—writing skills, tools, and practice are needed. Therefore, researchers often see the possibility of sharing their researches with the general public as an obstacle difficult to overcome, which can affect their careers. But the truth is that mitigating storytelling risks is not that difficult: researchers need to find a balance between what they want to say and what the [audience want to hear](#). This is what communication is about.

But how to combine reductionism and accuracy? Academia's narrative arc is much more complex than the classic narrative arc. While classic narrative stories begin with an exposition that brings the reader to a climax and end in a clear resolution, academia's narrative arc is full of expositions, data, findings, conclusions, etc. This narrative style is exactly what academics must forget when targeting the general public. To find another way to "tell your story," we suggest that you start thinking as both teacher and journalist. [Who are you going to write for?](#) What do you want to tell them that they still do not know?

Think About Your Target

The most difficult part for researchers is usually to lower themselves to their readers' level. While facing this problem, think about a teacher who is teaching maths to 10-year old kids. Should he teach them trigonometry, just because he excels in it? Being able to stoop to other people's level is actually a huge demonstration of intelligence.

Professionals with a high command of their field should be able to communicate about it. It is as simple as looking back and remembering when they did not have this knowledge. Ask yourself questions such as "what did I know about this by that time?" or "what did I want to learn about it?" to think about what you can tell them. If this is

particularly difficult for you, ask the opinion of others.

Look For a Good Story

Since you have to forget about the research narrative style, try to figure out how to make your research content interesting for the general public. Since it should be accessible, it is a good idea to focus on one part of your research. Your main goals, the obtained results or the difficulties faced while writing your [research paper](#) can be, for example, great starting topics.

Examples: If your research has plenty of applications for daily life or can be easily explained through examples, use them to highlight your research. If only one example is enough, focus on that one. Remember that the simplest is often the best.

Objectives: Explaining why your research can be positive for society or scientific development can easily captivate readers. People like positive stories, and studies always open doors to future improvements.

Results: Did you manage to discover something important? Focus on that. It is probably the easiest option, and since you have actually achieved something, the story has a clear goal: explaining your attainments.

Difficulties: Challenges are always a good starting point for attention-grabbing stories. Which are your main obstacles for reaching your goal? How do you deal with them? Remember that people like personal stories. Explaining how to deal with a particular problem from a human perspective can be really interesting.

And if you are going to count on journalists' help to transmit your stories, do not see them as enemies but as allies. They are specialists in transmitting difficult stories and information to the general public.

When trying to reduce risks in research narrative, keep two goals in mind: the story should be [comprehensible](#) to the general public and it must be a story you are proud of. Try to make it simple, but do not let all your effort in academia be thrown away.

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