About ENDURE'S Communication Team

ENDURE's Communication Team is made up of communication professionals and scientists committed to ensuring news and findings from ENDURE's activities reach the widest possible audience.

This includes the production, editing and writing of a range of print products, including press releases, posters, brochures and adviser's guides (From Science to Field). The Communications Team member in your organisation will be happy to offer advice on any aspect of communication or help you identify further sources of help.

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About ENDURE

ENDURE is the European Network for the Durable Exploitation of Crop Protection Strategies. ENDURE is a Network of Excellence (NoE) with two key objectives: restructuring European research and development on the use of plant protection products, and establishing ENDURE as a world leader in the development and implementation of sustainable pest control strategies through:

> Building a lasting crop protection research community
> Providing end-users with a broader range of short-term solutions
> Developing a holistic approach to sustainable pest management
> Taking stock of and informing plant protection policy changes.

Eighteen organisations in 10 European countries are committed to ENDURE for four years (2007-2010), with financial support from the European Commission's Sixth Framework Programme, priority 5: Food Quality and Security.

Website and ENDURE Information Centre

www.endure-network.eu

Making The News

Successful communication for agricultural scientists

Andrew Lewer, ENDURE web editor, CIRAD, France
Janne Hansen, University of Aarhus, Denmark

endure
diversifying crop protection

Food Quality and Safety
SIXTH FRAMEWORK PROGRAMME

Making The News

Successful communication for agricultural scientists

The importance of communicating agricultural and other sciences to a broad audience cannot be underestimated. Whether it is a member of the public seeking information allowing them to take an informed stance on a controversial topic such as GMOs or a farmer seeking insights into the latest research, the onus is on the scientific community to communicate in ways that are relevant, accessible and understandable.

Communication in itself is not difficult, we all do it every day of our lives, but communicating science demands a special effort from the writer (or speaker). Ditching the classic formula for a scientific paper remains a great challenge. But introduction followed by theory, experimentation, results, discussion and conclusion does not work for a popular feature or news story on science. Instead it is results that count, backed up with conclusions and discussions and an insight into the work involved.

It takes time to become comfortable with a new way of expressing yourself, but there are a number of guidelines that can ease the process. And there is a growing recognition that a commitment to communicating science can bring professional as well as personal satisfaction.

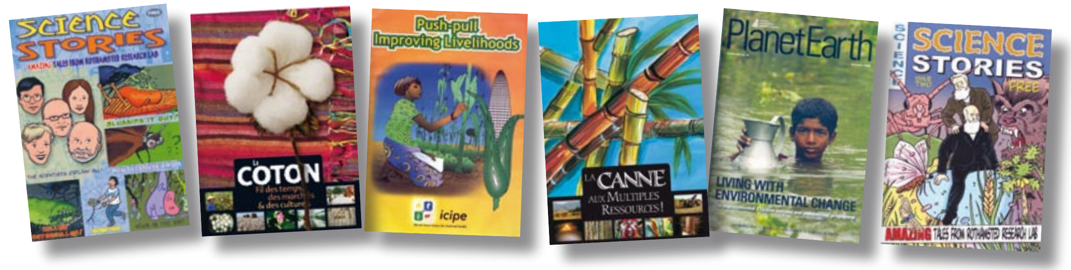
"There is a strong case that a well-balanced successful career in science will include excellence in research and teaching, plus excellence in public engagement," Alan Thorpe, chief executive of the UK's National Environment Research Council, told readers of his organisation's award-winning Planet Earth magazine this summer. "It should be part of every scientist's life to engage with the public in one way or another."

Good popular science stories take complicated material and make it understandable, exciting, entertaining and relevant. This benefits readers, journalists and the scientists involved. So how do we achieve this?

What is news?

You will often hear journalists talk of 'hard' and 'soft' news. Hard news stories are those involving any of the superlatives, such as the first, oldest, biggest or smallest. Beyond this are 'soft' news stories - soft does not always mean less important, but less startling. For many journalists, it can be a struggle to think of hard news as anything beyond showbiz, sport and disasters.

Whether hard or soft, good popular science stories must be informative, interesting, understandable, entertaining and educational. And there must be something newsworthy too, something current, important and to which the reader can relate. An element of sensation or conflict makes stories interesting. If you heard this story at work, would you tell family or friends about it when you got home?



How do I start a science story?

Finding the right angle and the all-important first paragraph to grab a reader's interest takes time and practice. The abstract of your scientific paper is not going to do the trick!

Journalists call this the hook, as it is the device on which the story hangs. The raw material will almost certainly be found in the results of your scientific paper. Think of your target audience and what these results may mean to them. Start with your main finding and tell the whole story in the first sentence or so. Use the rest of the article to add colour and detail.

Your conclusions need to appear high in the story. You can return to how these results and conclusions were drawn later in the article, but don't forget that readers are unlikely to want to know the nitty-gritty of how this was achieved.

This does not mean that your personal experiences are unimportant: many readers love to hear about the challenges of fieldwork in remote places and the excitement of a new discovery in the lab.

Writing style

> Always write in plain English (or keep your local language simple). Simple language is not a reflection of simple thinking, but a way of communicating clearly. Think short words, short sentences and short paragraphs.

> If you are worried about being simplistic, bear in mind that the average reading age of readers of The Times and The Guardian (two high-brow UK daily newspapers) is 14.

> Technical jargon is not appropriate and will result in your article being rejected, your press release being binned or major sub-editing. If you have to use a technical term, explain what it means.

> Acronyms should be removed ASAP! If they must be used, explain what they mean the first time they appear.

> Write as you would speak, using punchy, clear and colourful words. Imagine you are at a bus stop explaining your work to a stranger with no background in science.

> Explain words and concepts in terms readers can relate to. If you are using figures, for example, one in four of the population is often more easily understood than 25%.

> Be entertaining. Do not be afraid to let loose a humorous remark or description. Science does not have to be boring to be serious!