



Communicating Your Work to Broad Audiences

Writing Opinion, Commentary, Explainers & More

Types of Commentaries

Timely: Reactive

- Commentary, context or information related to a current or recent event
- Within last month, week, or today

Timely: Proactive

- Push ideas into public awareness related to a new or upcoming event
- Today, next week, or next month

Timeless

- Commentary, explanation, and analysis that is always relevant
- Anytime between last month to next year

Make sure you have something to say

For opinion pieces, you need to identify the “big idea” you’re trying to get across, and the key points or facts you’ll use to support that central message. Your piece should aim to do one of the following:

- Call attention to challenges and opportunities
- Coalesce knowledge of a topic in the news, in plain English that you think laypeople need to understand
- Call for action or change
- Explore impacts of a policy, activity, or inaction
- Share new knowledge generated by your research
- Explain something that everyday people, or professionals, need to understand

Why you? Why now? Who will listen?

- Do you have professional credibility to lend to the topic? (and maybe a personal connection too?)
- Is something intrinsic motivating you to speak up? Or do you want a new way to amplify your work?
- Does your topic relate to something in the mainstream news or social media trends, or news in a particular industry? Is it important for general readers, or do you want to reach certain clinicians or people who work in policy or business?
- What’s your geographic focus - regional, statewide, national, and/or international audiences?
- What will you say that people haven’t heard before?

Pick your publication platform carefully

- Read items already published by the opinion and perspective sections of the outlet you’re targeting to make sure yours fits.
- Does the outlet have a length limit? Do they want a “pitch” before they give you the green light to write, or do they want a pre-written piece? Will they ask for edits or write the final headline for you?
- How timely is your piece, and what is the outlet’s standard for timeliness in letting prospective authors know if they’re interested? How long can you wait before taking it to another outlet?
- Does the outlet allow commenting, and will you be able to read and respond to initial comments?

Put your audience first

- Always be mindful of their knowledge level and how you can crystallize information for them.
- Use active verbs, analogies, anecdotes, and cultural references. Have a powerful opening paragraph to capture their attention and keep them reading.
- Base your claims/arguments on evidence from your research and research by other credible sources. Add links if the outlet allows this.
- Tell them what you think the reader (or the people who represent them, treat them, or work in their government agencies) should do or keep in mind for the future.
- Put general readers' interests before those of more specialized audiences you might also reach.

Where can you express your professional opinion?

Academic journal opinion/blog options

- Faster turnaround than research papers
- Can introduce limited new data
- Comment on the state of the field or the impact of new policy or practice development
- Journal-run blogs such as *Health Affairs Blog*, *JAMA Health Forum*, and *BMJ opinion*

Non-academic, premier print, and online news outlets:

- Top-tier (*New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Wall Street Journal*)
- Specialty (*Modern Healthcare*, *Politico*, *The Hill*, *The Conversation*)
- Regional (*Detroit News*, *Detroit Free Press*, *Bridge Magazine*)

Online-only outlets:

- National (*STAT News*, *Politico*, *The Conversation*)
- Regional (*Bridge MI*)

Choosing to publish in a non-academic outlet

- ✓ **Advantages:** Known “brands” among policymakers, advocates, and the public, high Google visibility, and some sites allow free, no-paywall republishing of content (within conditions)
- **Disadvantages:** Top-tier outlets get a high number of submissions and it's very difficult to be selected; most outlets hold copyright, so others cannot republish; some sites have open commenting so you must decide if you want to engage

Once you're published, share it widely!

- Don't assume people have seen it – make an effort to bring it to their attention.
- Post it on social media – several times. Tag relevant colleagues and organizations.
- Email it to colleagues and relevant leaders/groups, and funding agencies/foundations.
- Share it with your communications contact & IHPI for dissemination via their channels.
- Add it to your LinkedIn profile and your faculty profile page, and add it to your CV.
- If the issue you wrote about becomes timely again in the future, share it again via these methods.

Key Commentary Outlet for Academics

Learn more about writing for *The Conversation*, an independent news organization, offering explanatory journalism, analysis, and expert commentary from academics to the public:

theconversation.com/us/pitches

Ways to structure your commentary

When writing commentaries, you should convey a central message focused on a few key takeaways, provide context and significance, and focus on your goal in writing and your audience's goal in reading. Here are a few different ways to structure your piece:

1 A.B.T. Style (And, But, Therefore)

And... ← What we know OR What we learned that we expected

But... ← What we don't know OR What we learned that was surprising

Therefore... ← What we must do OR What the implications are

Timely (Reactive/Proactive) Commentaries:

- A: What just happened or is currently happening
- B: What the reader doesn't know that's relevant
- T: Implications for what the reader should think or do

Timeless Commentaries:

- A: What we know
- B: What we don't know
- T: Why it's important

2 "The Hourglass"



3 "The Swoop"

