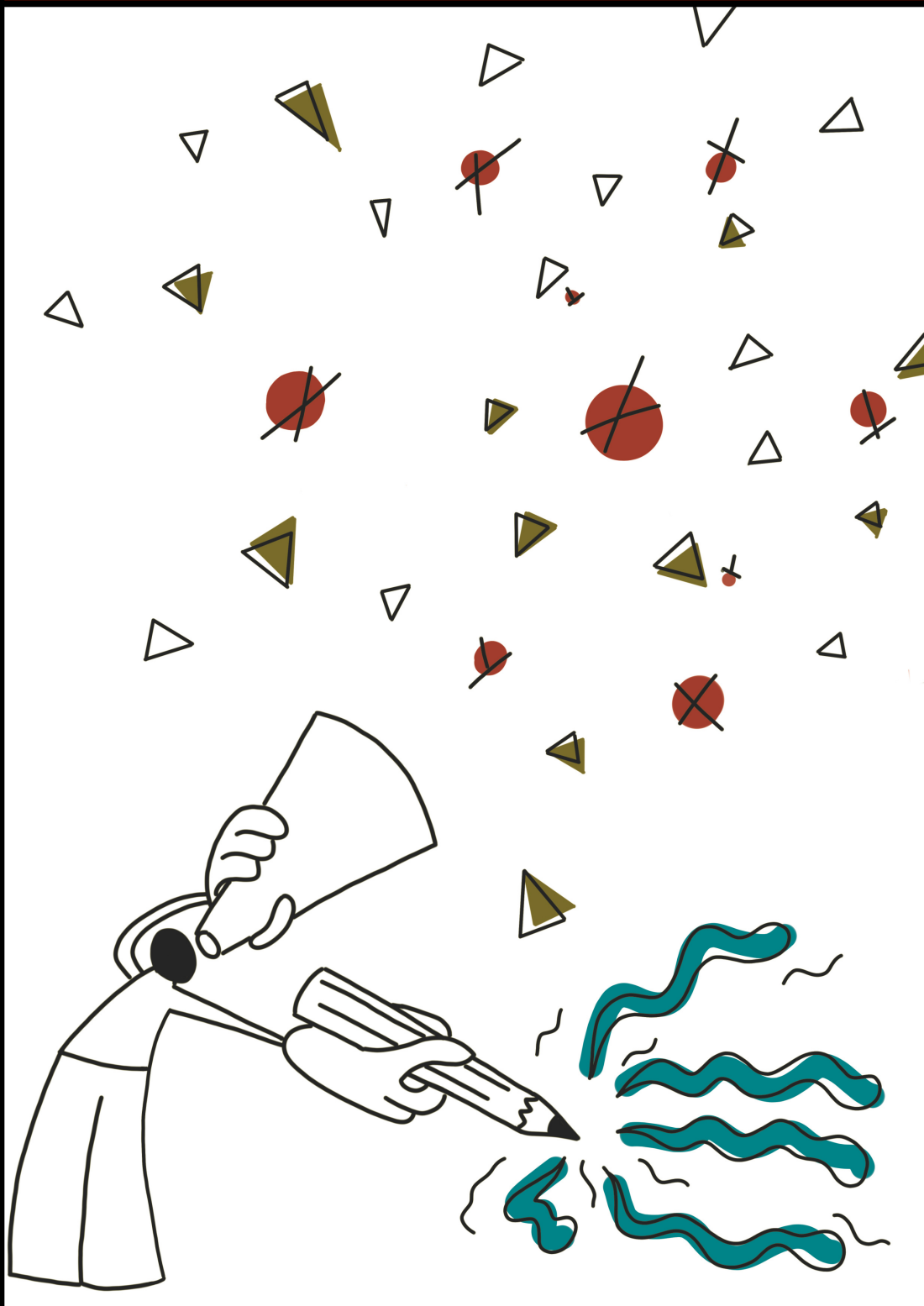


# LET'S COMMUNICATE!



**Highlighting the role of science  
to the general public**

# OUR FINDINGS OPEN NEW PATHS: **LET'S DISSEMINATE THEM!**

"Research is a social endeavor and so society at large should be informed about the results of research work, even more so if this work is financed by public institutions, as is the case for the NCCR. But more importantly, some of the findings of the NCCR Evolving Language can make a critical difference in political and ethical debates. For example, they foster a critical view on major evolutionary trends in technology that impact language, particularly in the neurosciences. The NCCR takes it as its mission to inform and advise about the risks and challenges that we are facing as individuals and as a society.

Therefore, disseminating our studies in society at large is absolutely essential, it is part of our very mission. We all engage with this responsibility, within our community and individually, and I find it important to keep this momentum.

I also know that this isn't always easy, we might not feel as eloquent as we had wished to be in an interview with journalists, or forgot a key point in the rush. Our explanation might fall flat or not hit the right nerves, it might be too complicated or too simplistic. However, all such disappointments and frustrations that we might feel pale in comparison with the good we can do through the many successful interviews and the wonderful opportunities they offer for building bridges with open minds, curious spirits, and potential partners.

Please take the courage to reach out to the public and don't hesitate to seek advice! We are all constantly learning, and outreach is clearly one of the competences that we constantly need to improve on as scientists."



**Balthasar Bickel, Director of the NCCR Evolving Language**

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# “FORGING LINKS BETWEEN SCIENTISTS OF TODAY AND THOSE OF TOMORROW”



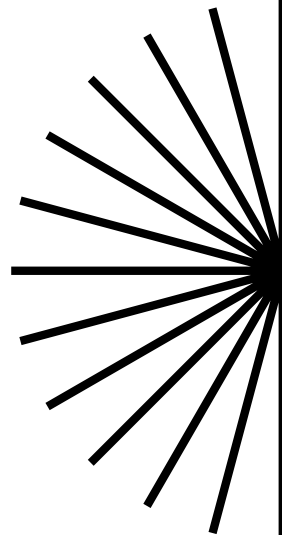
**Engaging in Dialogue – That's the Credo of Neuroscientist Valentina Borghesani.**

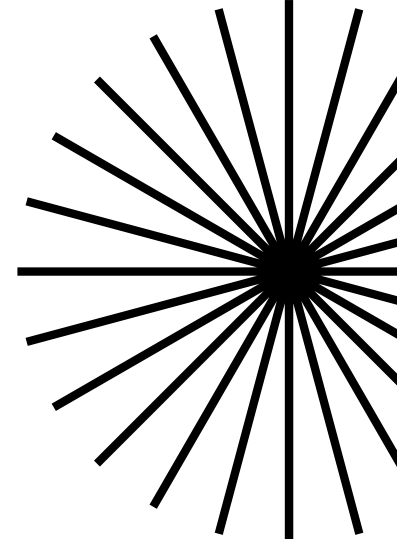

## **Valentina, what is your field of specialization?**

I am a researcher in cognitive neuroscience and clinical neuropsychology. My research involves a multidimensional investigation of the neurocognitive interaction between semantic knowledge and language; it is based on a wide range of approaches drawn from a variety of disciplines, including neuropsychology, cognitive neuroimaging (fMRI, MEG), and computer science.

## **Your most valuable experience working with communication?**

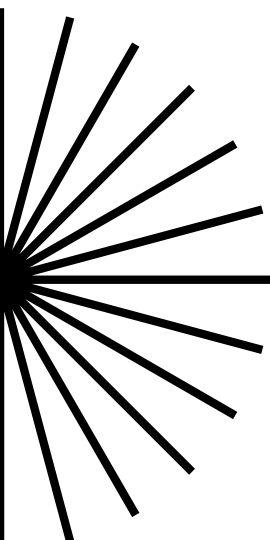
I have plenty! I have organized, among other things, the Kavli BrainTalks – a symposium at the University of California San Francisco (UCSF) attended by academics that have an interest in what's going on in the world of neuroscience. As a person who promotes science communication and raises public awareness, I have also taught and lectured outside academia, e.g., in schools and in museums – focusing primarily on multilingualism.





I am most proud of having introduced the concept of science correspondents in my home country, Italy. Every year, *Penne Amiche della Scienza* links up elementary school classes in Italy with scientists from many different fields. They exchange letters regarding subjects that are relevant to kids, and usually end the year by video calling each other. Our goal is to stimulate scientific thinking and promote careers by demythologizing the figure of the scientist and forging links between the scientists of today and those of tomorrow. We aspire to make sure that pupils receive a decent science education, regardless of gender, socioeconomic status, or ethnicity.

### Three keywords that best describe your communication plans?



**Honesty** – because experts, (and adults in general) often lose their ability to modestly admit that “they don't know”. I strive to communicate transparently.

**Passion** – be they personal or collective, our resources are too valuable to be wasted on something we're not passionate about.

**Diversity** – I've tried to reach different types of publics while listening to people's needs and learning from miscellaneous sources. In diversity lie both strength and progress!



# SHATTERING COMMON BELIEFS


**Science is fundamental to our modern society. Virtually every aspect of our everyday life is somehow influenced or shaped by science. Given this fundamental importance of science, it is surprising how little the general public knows about where science comes from and how it is done. And this fact becomes even more surprising if we realize that there would be a simple key to overcoming this information asymmetry: science communication.**

You may be wondering now: “Why should I invest any of my precious time into science communication? I am under constant pressure to publish papers and acquire funding! What is the benefit of communicating with the broader public about my research?” Well, there are a number of reasons!

**First**, because it gives a realistic and transparent picture of what research is all about: how you go about it, how you reach your conclusions, what these conclusions tell us (and what they don't), and so on. Much of your research is funded with public money, so it's only fair to give the public something in return, right?

**Second**, your projects, your struggles, your findings: they all form the basis for incredible stories. For you, the daily routine as a researcher may be the most natural thing in life, but for outsiders this may be much more exciting than you think. Also, your research may provide new insights into the world, encourage critical thinking and mitigate the danger posed by misinformation. Your research is the key to deciphering reality. By bringing it up, you can make this world a better place!



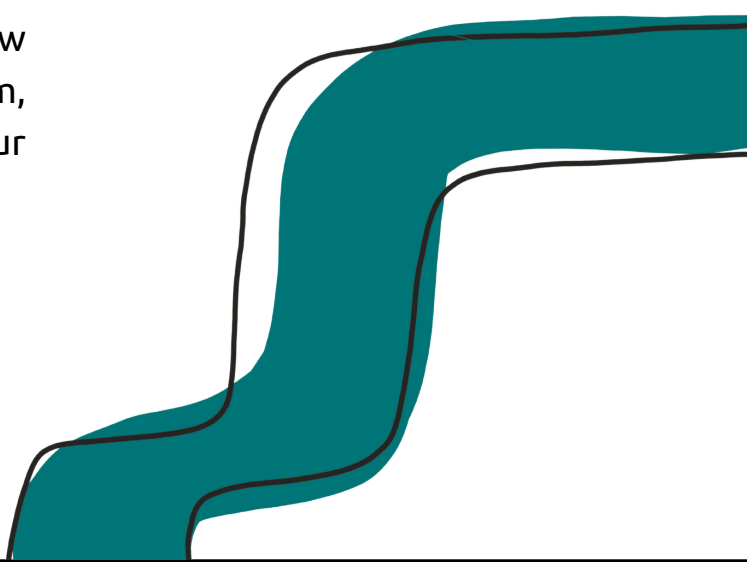


**Third**, for what reason do you get up in the morning? To bring home the bacon – that’s for sure! But also – and that makes you stand out – because you are passionate about what you do. And it is exactly this communicative passion that others are going to appreciate to its true value if you offer it to them.

Now that we have convinced you that science communication is worth the effort, you want to know how it’s done, right? Well, we very much appreciate your enthusiasm, but before we can jump into the topic, let us be clear about one thing: You will be facing a challenge. Making your knowledge accessible to a wider public is not necessarily an easy task. Knowing about your field of research is only half the battle. You also need to know who your audience is, how you can best interact with them, and how you can bring across your message to them.

Challenge accepted? We knew we could count on you! The following pages will guide you not only through the why and how, but also the who, when, where, and how much of scientific communication. Browse through them for a theoretical framework in addition to many useful tools and tips!

**And now: Have fun with your first science communication project!**



# “CREATING AN ENVIRONMENT WHERE OUR RESEARCHERS ARE PROACTIVE IN COMMUNICATING”



The communication office is not only in charge of social networks, but also handles a wide variety of projects! Here's an overview with Emilie Wyss, Head of Program Management for the NCCR.

## Emilie, in what way does your team support the research teams at the NCCR Evolving Language?

Our role is rather broad as we are in charge of all the aspects of institutional communication. We can separate this into two axes: internal communication, reserved for the NCCR community, and external communication which will address different audiences, such as researchers, our partners, journalists and the general public. Each time we want to launch a communication activity, we have to find the right channel, the right format, the right language... and make sure to never forget all the parties involved! It's a balance that is perfected over time.

## What concrete tools do you offer them?

Our internal communication relies on a mix of different channels (mailing lists, newsletters, website) and is completed with the organization of social gatherings that aim at nurturing our network. Our external communication tackles different angles and we are always open to add more to our list.

## What are the long-term plans for the NCCR communication activities?

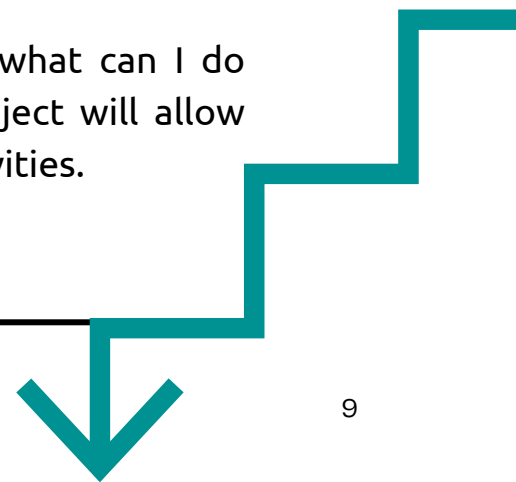
We would really like to create an environment where our researchers are proactive in communicating. But to do so, we must be able to give them the tools they need.



# 1. LAYING THE FOUNDATION OF YOUR OUTREACH PROJECT.

Communication is based on pragmatism, a little flair, and most importantly planning. Any communication action relies on 6 fundamental pillars:

1. **Your objectives:** What's the goal of your science communication? Do you want to make your project known, to raise public awareness of an issue, to promote community-friendly behavior?
2. **Your target audiences:** Who is your audience? Is it your peers, your academic community, the public, the media, politicians?
3. **Your messages:** In one sentence, what's the message you want to get across to your community?
4. **Your strategic focus:** How will you reach your objectives? The answer to this question is essential for choosing the right channels and the right style. Do you choose to communicate through direct contact or via digital means? Do you adopt a serious or an entertaining tone?
5. **Your action plan:** What are the individual steps of your communication project and how will you go about them? Your action plan will help you turning your project into reality and doing the right things at the right time.
6. **Your self-assessment:** What did I learn and what can I do better next time? A critical review of your project will allow you to capitalize on learning for your future activities.



# 2. CHOOSING THE RIGHT CHANNELS.

We are never low on choices when it comes to communication channels! But what are the most relevant ones according to the objectives, goals, contents, and means you have?

## On the Web

Using the web is great to reach people from all over the world, most of the time free of charge/with low investment. However, don't forget that still not everyone is comfortable using the internet and you don't want to exclude them completely!

- (Your) **Website** – a place where people can find everything about you and your research. Your website is in the end a modern business card.
- (Institutional) **Websites** – feel free to send us updates on your works so we can also publish it on our website! Other websites, like your university's, might also be interested in sharing your work!
- **Newsletter** – a great way to keep people updated about what you do.
- **Social media** – keep in touch with your community, attract new people and keep them interested. And pay attention to the pitfalls of social media, explained later in the booklet.
- **Digital media** – magazines and journals are also published online, making article more accessible. Though there are paywalls... Blogs are also a way to share your work, with a more or less detailed article. They can be specialized or not.
- **Chat, videoconference** - to interact with your community, even from far away. Be careful about making things simple enough and marketing when the event will happen!



## Traditional media

Generally, traditional media are more trusted and give off a professional and polished image. They have (usually) a wide audience, so with them, you can interest the lay public in your research. Be careful that traditional media have a location! Not everyone on earth will have access to it.

- **Newspapers** – they can have specialized and/or non-specialized public, with a wide-range of interests (economy, animals, medicine...) so adapt to who you're talking to!
- **Publishing** (booklets, magazines, leaflets) – a nice solid book, so everything can be in one place. Though it can take time to find a nice way to lay out the content and the design!
- **Radio and television** – exchanging with a journalist orally can be a great format to interest new people in your research. Videos and audio formats are easier to follow for some people, and encourage the simplification of your work. Learn more about giving interviews in this booklet!

## Others



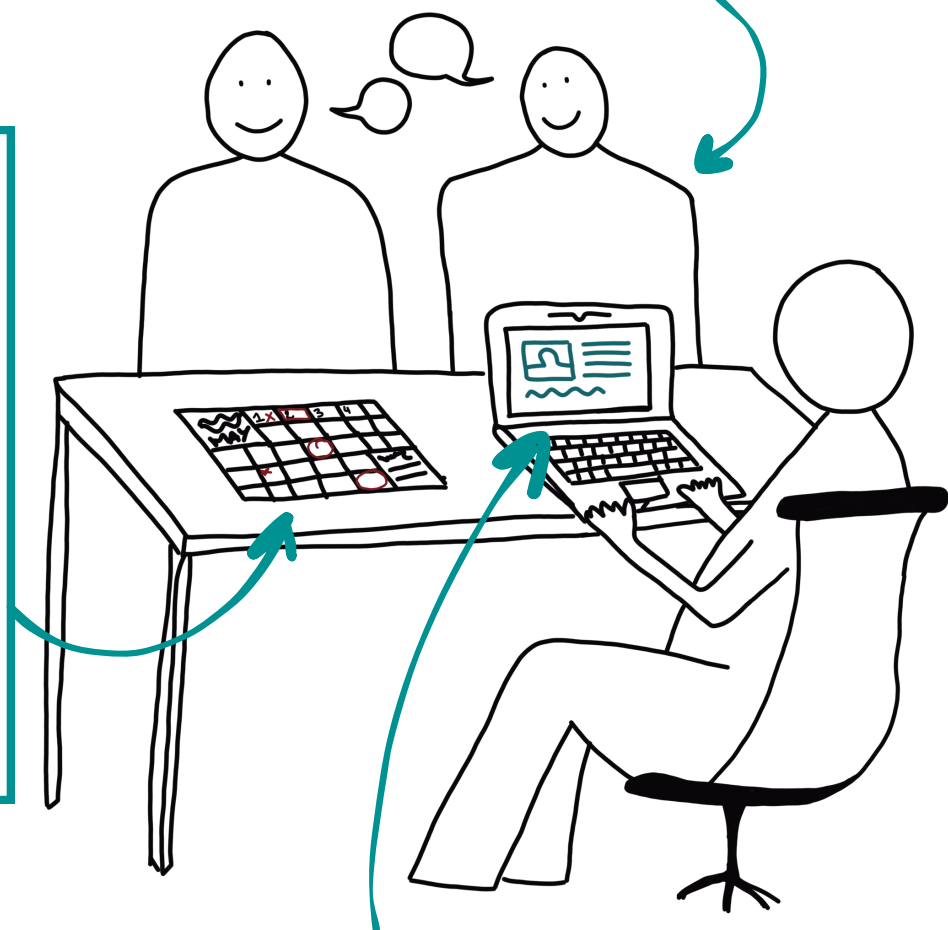
There are other, more original, ways to share your research!

- **Science fairs** – a way to interact with your audience live! Answer questions, explain your research, organize activities so passersby remember you!
- **Museums** – collaborating with museums can give a new perspective to your research, and include it in a wider problematic. Museums also need experts to give talks or guide visitors, while sharing their unique outlook.
- **Mobile applications** - sharing your work can also be through an interactive and fun experience!

# 3. ORGANISATION, ORGANISATION...

Sometimes, you may not be working on a communication project alone but together with your teammates. In such constellations, it is essential to define who does what when. Task calendars are very helpful tools for that purpose. Once everyone involved is on hand, you can start making decisions. But taking quick decisions in large groups can be tricky, especially when people are busy with many other projects. Here, setting up a taskforce or delegating tasks to individuals are often sensible measures.

Including your communication activities into your overall time management will allow you to plan things well ahead of time. This will ensure that you have adequate resources for your project and will enable you to prioritize and coordinate your actions accordingly so that you can work on individual projects efficiently.



Are you communicating on social media? That's a great choice, but beware: You will need to carefully coordinate and time your activities to maximize their impact. Here, a digital communication plan is a powerful tool to keep track of who needs to do what, where, and when.

# 4. EXPLORE THE WORLD OF YOUR USER PERSONAS.

Experts often suffer from the “curse of knowledge”. Ever heard of it? It means that you tend to overestimate the knowledge of other individuals when talking to them about your area of expertise. In this way, facts that are simple and obvious to you may sound like rocket science to the ears of an outsider.

Knowing your audience can help you to get rid of the “curse of knowledge” and to make you sure that you are being understood. A helpful tool for getting to know your audience is the concept of the “persona”. Personas are archetypes representative of your target groups. The following questions will help you work them out:



Who is your audience target?

What kind of information is important to them?

What do they know about your work and what do they think about it?

What is their job?

What might interest them?

Are they able to understand you (language, IT, or technical skills)?

Your gallery of archetypical portraits will give you valuable information on how much your audience knows and how much they care about your project. This will not only help you to be understood but also help you to anticipate questions and objections that some individuals in the audience may have.

# 5. MESSAGES AS A THREAD IN YOUR COMMUNICATION.

You have been toiling for months, if not years, to get the results you are presenting today – the fruits of long, meticulous, technical, and precise work. Therefore, you could go on talking about it for hours and hours. However, in our fast-paced world you won't get more than a few minutes, and communicating under time pressure requires a completely different approach. Do not go into details in front of an audience that will not be able to follow you. Stick to the basics; if they were to remember only one thing, what would it be? When it comes to communication, your message is at the heart of the matter. Therefore, try to crystallize it in just one or two sentences conveying what you want your community to retain. This is the thread that will make your performance coherent and easy to follow. Does the message convey anything new or surprising? Bingo! The brain will remember facts more easily if they are surprising!



A powerful thread displays the following attributes:

- **Accessible:** You are addressing non-specialists, so make sure that your message is intelligible to your target audience. You're not sure whether your message is getting across? No problem! Just do a test run with a representative test audience!
- **Relevant:** What is the best way to make your audience catch on? You have to spark their interest and, as such, resonate with them. Therefore, always make sure that your audience sees the relevance of what you're telling them.
- **Surprising:** We are aware that science is a serious business, but a pinch of humor and surprise can be incredibly helpful in getting your audience's attention. Don't worry, there's no need to play the clown. Revealing the right facts at the right moment may just do the trick!



# 6. COMMUNICATION: CONCISE, CAPTIVATING, CONVINCING.



Whether you are writing or speaking, clarity is key! If you want to make yourself understood, put into practice the 3 Cs of effective communication and be ...

## ...Concise

- Stick to the basics: What do you want to put across to your community?
- Stay clear – pay attention to logic and connections.
- Use light syntax.



## ...Captivating

- Does your research resonate with the lives of others? Make connections, draw comparisons, provide examples!
- Tell stories: Anecdotes, successes, and fiascos are an integral part of your scientific adventure.
- Personalize your presentation by addressing your targets personally; anticipate their questions.

## ...Convincing

- Embody your activity by bringing up the things that fascinate, inspire, and amaze you.
- Voice your doubts and disappointments: They are all part of the game; in doing so, you gain more credibility.
- Infographics, charts, and photos will shed light on what you say.



**And... be courteous! Pay attention to your audience's questions and comments – they deserve it!**





# 7. WHAT IS WELL THOUGHT OUT IS WELL SPELLED OUT.



You do not want your community to get muddled up with obscure terms, sophisticated expressions, and technical vocabulary. Nevertheless, keeping things simple is not always easy. If you want to stay on the right track, you need to structure your wording tightly and express yourself clearly.

## The Framework

It is important that in any communication, the 5 W questions find an answer: Who, What, When, Where and Why? Having this information in your communication will make sure that your audience can picture and be interested in your work, while retaining key messages.

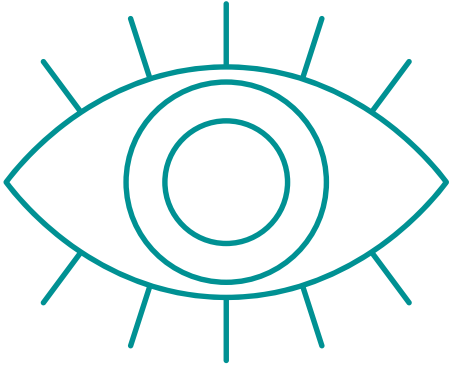
## The Structure

Remember that you have to keep your audience's attention, whether you are writing or speaking to them. For this, use the hourglass structure: you start with the most general and important information, then gradually go deeper to share your ideas. Lastly, you can reopen your topic with a take-home message and perspectives that can resonate with your public.

## The Wording

- Use concrete, short, everyday words and wording.
- Use the right amount of jargon, loanwords, or foreign words and explain them when you have no choice but to use them.
- Form short sentences of approximately 15 words.
- Use affirmative rather than negative sentences.
- Prefer the active voice rather than the passive one.
- Your paragraphs should be between 5 and 7 lines long.
- Avoid using subordination as much as possible. For instance, never put things this way: "The author I am citing, who works on language, which is one of the greatest mysteries of humanity, is going to attend this conference."
- Convey one single idea per sentence.

# 8. DRESS UP YOUR WORDS!



The eye scans pages – be it digital or printed – following visual cues. Text boxes, headings, spaces: all of them serve as signposts guiding you through the text! Various features can improve the readability of your text, e.g. you can ...

## 1. Use headings a. and subheadings

This will divide your texts into distinct parts. On the Internet, they contribute to SEO (Search Engine Optimization). Keywords may thus boost the ranking of your text in search engines.

Set the **main elements in bold** so they stand out.

- Use bullet point lists - to avoid tedious enumerations
- and thus - provide an explanation for each individual terms.

Use sidebars and text boxes to grab the attention of your reader. Make good use of them to explain or offer an alternative perspective to the body of your text.

Use sans serif fonts like Arial, Verdana or Ubuntu (the one used by your NCCR ), which are more legible.

Generally, set up the font size to 11 pt for everyone to be happy.

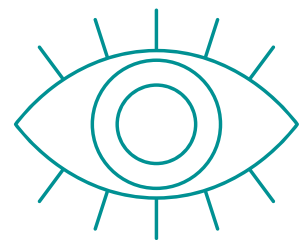
Use spaces to lighten your paper articles.

If you want your readers to keep reading your texts,

let the latter catch their breath

so as to make reading more enjoyable!

Be logical and consistent:  
Make sure your layout **coheres**.

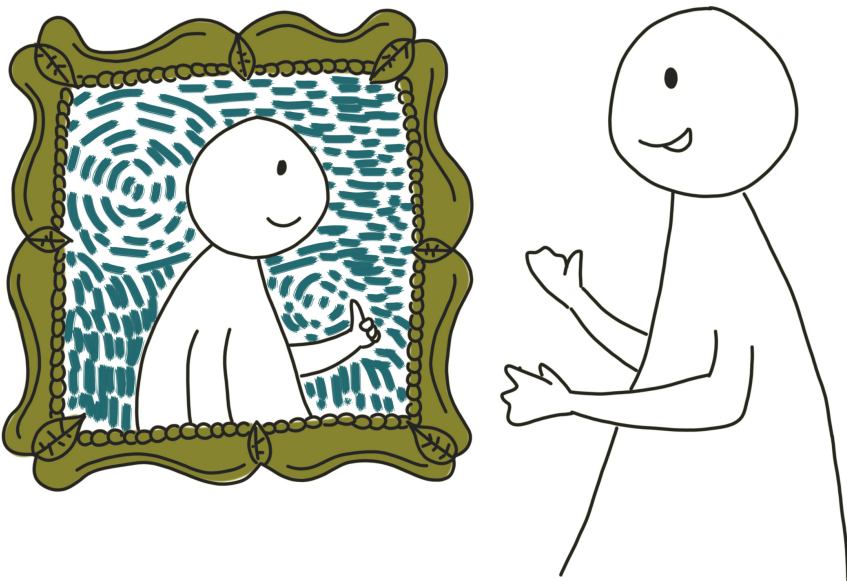


# 9. A PICTURE PAINTS A THOUSAND WORDS.

Visuals have become so prevalent that any lecture, article, or tweet without them seems incomplete. In fact, if you don't include illustrations, you run the risk of boring your audience. As a result, you may have less people viewing or sharing your communication project.

**Carefully choose the visuals that accompany your texts. They should...**

- be in line with what you say but should not replace it.
- be clear and meaningful. Don't fall into the trap! The message of our visualizations may be obvious to you, but they may not be to your community. Show them to someone before publishing to make sure they are crystal clear.
- jazz the content up.
- have a resolution high enough for their intended use.



The illustrations you use can be produced professionally so you are assured they are understandable and suit your theme as well as the overall tone of your communication.

**Be careful of copyright !  
The images you use have to be copyright-free or acquired in order.**

# 10. SOCIAL MEDIA: GOOD PRACTICES IN YOUR DAILY LIFE.

If you're going to be on Instagram at work, you might as well justify it! Your contribution on social media helps the NCCR to be consistent and up to date with its community. So don't forget to mention us!



- Inform yourself on the **different formats proposed by the NCCR** and register to participate! Contact the NCCR Communication office, so you can work together on an editorial calendar in accordance with the schedule (publishing results, launching research, conferences, events, etc.).
- Upload on the **scheduled date**.
- Find the right and meaningful **artwork to accompany your content** in advance. Like the texts, they are going to benefit from being authentic and serious. Don't forget about copyright issues!
- Did you successfully convert your content into **everyday language**? Ask your Communication officer or a third party for their input.
- Favor **short texts** and turn your phrases using **affirmative forms**.
- Select relevant **hashtags** for your content.
- Your post draws **comments**: reply to your community!

# DonTs

- A **single format may not be adapted** for every platform, because their audience and modalities are different. Do the right thing by adapting your posts (objectives, text length, images...).
- If a user or member of your community acts provocatively, or simply questions your work, **take the time to reflect on the situation** with the help of your Communication office before responding. This will help you better defuse the situation. You can also take a look at our External Guidelines for Social Media Use.



# 11. INTERNAL NCCR GUIDELINES FOR SOCIAL MEDIA.

You relay information for the NCCR – therefore, you are one of its representatives. Thanks to you and your connections, research bearing the NCCR Evolving Language trademark can spread a little more around the world. It can attract the attention of partners, future collaborators, etc.

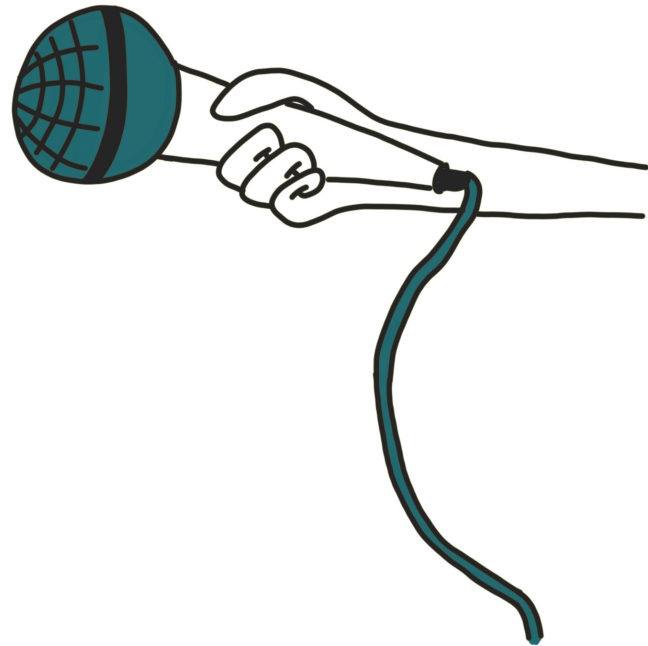
Each member of your NCCR can contribute to the promotion of your scientific advances as well as open dialog with your target audience. Furthermore, your NCCR tries to make your presence felt on LinkedIn, Instagram, and Twitter. By sharing publications with the community, commenting and reacting to posts, we try to raise the visibility of your research.

**But be careful !** Everything that is published online is regarded as public. Once published, it can potentially stay on the web forever and be susceptible to uncontrolled dissemination. Whether you are posting for business or pleasure, you should take into consideration that even the Internet has laws ; you are liable not only for your reputation, but also for your institution and co-workers.

- A basic principle is to never publish anything you would not support in public (for instance in front of a colleague).
- If you happen to read or hear (of) either misleading information about the NCCR and/or its members, bring it to your Communication Officer's attention ASAP.
- If you want to express yourself on issues that are sensitive in your field, you can discuss it with the communication office to find the best way to do so.

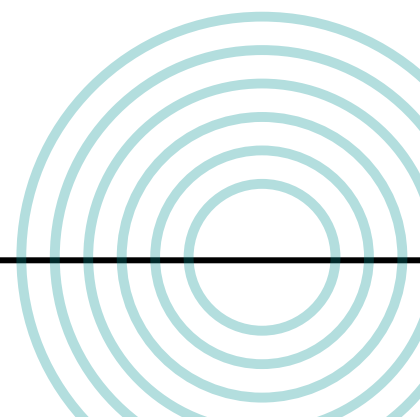
# 12. AND FINALLY, HERE COMES THE INTERVIEW!

Recorded or live; in front of a microphone, on camera, or by videoconference: Interviews are challenging exercises. They offer an opportunity to talk about your research. But you should remain vigilant – even if you are experienced – before, during and after the interview!



**BEFORE the interview**, find out about:

- The preparation time: No one can force you to answer out of the blue; you are allowed to get ready.
- The length: you won't give the same answer if you have 1 hour or 1 minute dedicated to your topic!
- The adopted perspective: Does it seem relevant to you? Should it be broadened, nuanced, oriented differently? It is a matter of finding some common ground with the reporter while staying true to yourself.
- The type of questions you expect to be asked.
- The type of article, program, or format in which what you say will be featured : if you are invited as an expert, you may not be the only one speaking and other subjects can be covered.
- If you need to provide images or visuals.







### **DURING the interview:**

- Use simple sentences and everyday language while speaking at a steady tempo.
- Use metaphors and comparisons with phenomena familiar to the audience.
- Your interlocutor asks you to go off topic or to make interpretations: Set your limits! (“This is not today’s topic.”)
- Recorded appearances: You are allowed to start over if you feel unhappy about anything.
- Open-minded and smiling: having a positive attitude brings you closer to those in the audience.
- Unexpected question? Don’t give up! Express yourself about what you know, while trying to find a link between the question and your expertise.



### **AFTER the interview:**

- Stay professional and focused until the very end: your image is important all the way.
- Find out when the interview will be published/broadcast.
- When the interview is released, share it on the Web using links redirecting to your apparition.
- Keep the reporter's contact details: there may be opportunities to work with them on a story in the future.
- You can ask to proofread or review what you have said before it goes out. But you cannot request to edit the body of a story and comments or statements that are not yours.

Don't forget to tell the NCCR communication team about the interview before it takes place. That way, we can inform the community about it.

# 13. ROLLING! GET COMFORTABLE, CHILL OUT...

More often than not, live broadcasting seems daunting. Be yourself, well prepared, and make yourself comfortable.

## The must: Feel comfortable in your clothes and shoes

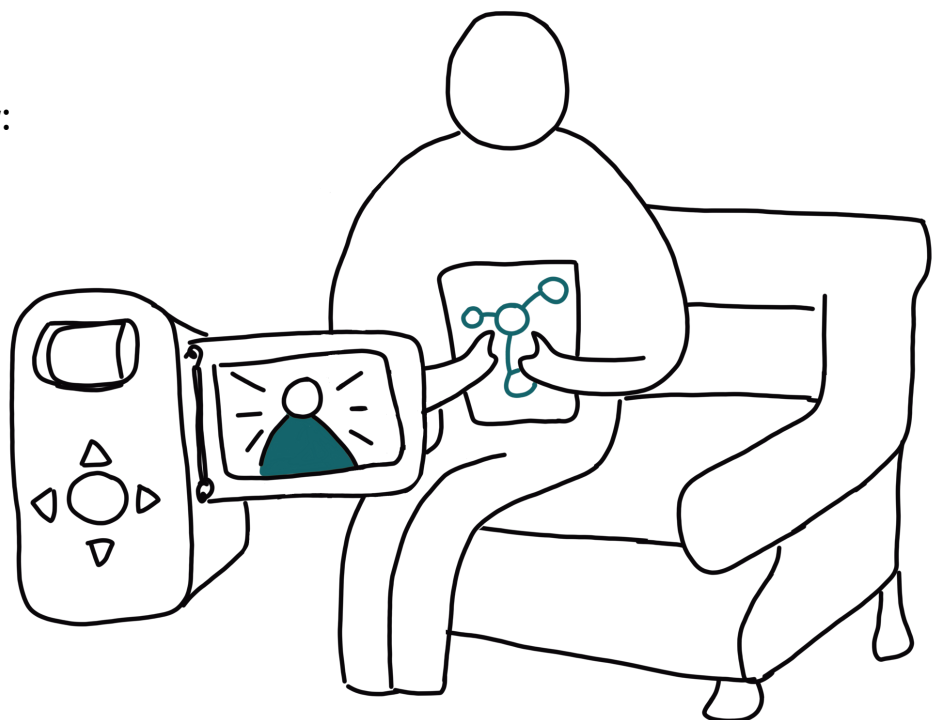
Are you appearing on TV? Here are some tips!

Avoid:

- Highly saturated colors like red, yellow or orange.
- Green, as you could melt into a potential green screen.
- Clothes with printed patterns, stripes, polka dots, checks, etc.

The lens is attracted by:

- Neutral colors
- Long sleeves
- Plain accessories
- Mat makeup




## And if you go blank??



At times, a question may take you aback, or you may simply have a memory lapse. In that case, remember the general message you want to get across. You can keep a reminder at hand, just in case. But be careful to only pick keywords, so you avoid reading!

## On TV or the Radio: your body talks too!



- One second of silence before you start speaking will give you the time you need to come up with a clear answer – so, no need to rush.
  - Breathe – this is fundamental! The best way to control your stress and your speech flow is to take some time to breathe. If you feel like you're speaking too fast or like your voice is shaking, don't hesitate to take a deep breath between two sentences. This will allow you to relax. Don't be scared of this moment of silence. Your audience will also be able to relax for a moment and to store what you're passing on to them.
  - Keep your mouth fit! Before going on stage, you might find it helpful to perform some warm-up, diction exercises. Choose your tongue twisters, e.g.: "Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers. How many pickled peppers did Peter Piper pick?" or "How much wood would a woodchuck chuck if a woodchuck could chuck wood?"
  - Stand up straight, in a comfortable position, with your feet firmly planted on the ground (or on the leg of the stool if need be).
  - "To be on time is to be late already!" By arriving early, you'll be less stressed, and you'll have more time to settle in and get comfortable.
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# nccr evolving language

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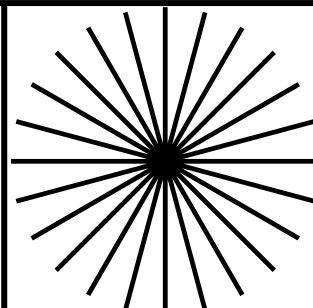
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