DRPR

Deutscher Rat für Public Relations

DRPR Guideline Science PR

The following guideline takes into account the *guidelines for good science PR* of *Wissenschaft im Dialog (WiD)* (Science in dialogue) and the *Bundesverband Hochschulkommunikation (Federal Association of University Communication*) as well as various elaborations of the *Siggener Kreis* (Siggener Circle).

The individual antecedents are listed in the annex; due to better readability, citations have been omitted - as with all other guidelines. The framework of this guideline is the dialogue between science and the general public and not the discourse within the scientific community.

The guideline itself does not claim to be scientific, but is pragmatically intended to substantiate the German communication code in the field of science communication, to provide orientation in the professional field in practical work and to be a guideline for the Council in its decision-making practice. It is aimed at communicators in agencies, universities and institutions of all kinds as well as communicating scientists.

Fundamentals

In the course of society-changing developments such as pandemics or the climate crisis, the importance of science communication has increased considerably in the public arena.

The resulting higher information needs of a broader public are contrasted by a media landscape that is rather thin on resources and cannot always fully fulfil its gatekeeper functions of prioritising, evaluating and classifying scientific developments.

In contrast, an enormously diverse social media landscape makes it easy to become a broadcaster as a scientific entity, but here important and unimportant facts, opinions and half-knowledge stand side by side on an equal footing. This opens the gate to distortions, exaggerated expectations of solutions, vanity and complete fake news. To ensure the quality of communication, it is important to create guidelines and to compare them on an international level.

This overall situation requires responsible science communication that sees itself as a critical gatekeeper and mediator between science and future-oriented decision-making needs. This affects scientists and communicators alike and requires self-critical dialogue, also within the scientific institutions. No communicator can retreat to the role of a vicarious agent.

It is important not to simply broadcast without reflection, but to be aware of one's role in society, to proactively check potential news for relevance and evidence, to correctly classify topics in their context and, if necessary, to dispense with news that is not sufficiently reliable.

In this respect, science communication is quite different from other disciplines such as market or customer communication. Staged setups find their limits where they do not serve the clarity of content and didactics. Especially with health issues, for example, creating exaggerated and unrealistic expectations must be avoided at all costs.

The per se rather high complexity of scientific topics, as well as the vagueness and principle revisability of scientific findings, combined with often completely different public expectations (desire for unambiguity), make it all the more important that both scientists and communicators are aware of their responsibility and communicate accordingly in a measured manner. This also includes assessing the impact of the communicated results responsibly and comprehensively.

In detail:

I. Ethical requirements

1. Sticking to the facts

Science communication should offer new findings, facts, theses and their development processes as well as classifications that are comprehensible for laypersons. Exaggerations, omission of important contextual information, concealing or downplaying of risks is inadmissible. This is what we mean by sticking to the facts, and it is our claim above all else. If there is any doubt, no communication should take place. The following applies in principle: Those who disseminate knowledge have a responsibility to do based of truthfulness.

2. Comprehensibility

Science communication for the general public must be geared towards making it possible for laypersons to understand and classify content. Communication must also be linguistically compatible in order to ensure exchange with other social actors. The simplification that is often necessary for this must not falsify any facts, while at the same time the framework conditions inherent in science (such as working methods) must be made comprehensible.

3. Relevance filter for society

Science communication has to filter out the information that is as relevant as possible for the public. Basic research is an exception. Here the degree of social relevance is not always known in advance, although it must be carried out nonetheless. This must not be done solely on the basis of the interests of one's own institution. The content should not be conveyed exclusively but should be accessible to the general public as far as possible. The actors in science communication must remain incorruptible and non-partisan at all times.

4. Storytelling

Storytelling, i.e. embedding and clarifying factual content in examples, stories or analogies, is a legitimate form of didactics and has its justified place in science communication, especially for achieving greater comprehensibility for a broader public. A focus on core content is legitimate. However, no compromises should be made with regard to factual accuracy. In particular, care must be taken to ensure that core content is not overlaid, distorted or falsified by secondary aspects. The focus of communication must not be primarily driven by commercial interests.

5. **Increased transparency requirements**
   Sources, contact persons, other cooperation partners involved and relevant advisors as well as financial dependencies of any kind must be named transparently. The methodology must be described as accurately and comprehensibly as possible, especially with regard to its transferability. This also applies to the objectives and the classification in the current state of research in accordance with scientific truthfulness. Scientific institutions are obliged to provide transparent information in response to enquiries from politicians or the media, as long as this does not violate any other rights (freedom of science, confidentiality agreements, GDPR, patent rights, etc.).

6. **Preprints**
   As a rule, planned publications should have undergone a peer review process before they are communicated. Preprints may only be used for communication if there is a demonstrably high public interest in being informed rapidly. They must then be explicitly named as provisional and classified accordingly in a responsible manner. They must not be placed on the same level as peer-reviewed publications. As soon as the review is available, an update must be made. This is especially true if this requires a complete correction or even retracting a publication.

7. **Communicating uncertainties**
   Science is based on the principle of trial and error. Its findings are initially valid for the time being and can be supplemented, confirmed or revised by new knowledge at any time. The limits of the statements and methods of research must therefore always be made clear. This is especially true when the public discussion calls for clarity and speed. The significance of results - for example in terms of representativeness or scientific quality criteria such as objectivity, reliability or validity - must always be questioned self-critically in science communication.

8. **Respectful interaction and constructive cooperation** Science communication requires being ready to conduct open dialogue and have respect for the positions of all participants. Within the framework of PR activities, content must be handled responsibly and "spamming" of individual channels or target groups must be avoided. Furthermore, it is important to refrain from jumping on trends with content that is not or hardly relevant.

II. The role of scientists and communicators

1. Responsibility at management level

Communicators should be placed in the hierarchy of their institutions in such a way that they can responsibly enforce communication guidelines such as this guideline. This can only be done on an equal footing with the scientists and with the possibility of being able to justifiably refuse assignments. The responsibility for communication concerns scientists and communicators individually and collectively. All institutions that engage in science communication should agree on communication structures with their management levels - which should at least include social media guidelines and rules on risk and crisis communication.

2. Advisory and steering functions

Communicators must take on an advisory and, to some extent, a steering role - on the one hand in relation to their management levels and on the other in relation to the scientists and managers of their respective institutions, institutes, companies, etc. They must be proactively informed about the risks they run when communicating publicly (e.g. defamation) and what protective measures can be taken. Communicating scientists need a transparent support process for their communication activities. This may also include coaching of scientists by professional communication departments and continuously developing communication skills in the scientific world.

3. Appearances in public

Which scientific voices are heard by the public should not depend solely on the media talent and charisma of individual persons. Before media appearances, the format and environment must be checked to ensure that the scientific content is conveyed truthfully.

III. The presentation of scientific findings and the use of studies in PR outside the field of science PR

This guideline is designed to govern communication between researchers and their institutions, as well as the general public. However, companies and other organisations also use studies or scientifically styled communication formats, presented as 'studies', for PR purposes. By doing so, they leverage the reputation of the scientific community and the resulting greater impact of such presentations. The DRPR is committed to safeguarding the trustworthiness of science and scientific communication. The regulation of the use of scientific studies outside the realm of science PR is therefore as follows:

(1) In general, the use and publication of studies for PR purposes is legitimate if they are genuine research studies that have been conducted in accordance with the relevant scientific quality and validity criteria of the discipline in question. Details of the study design and methodology (data collection methods) must be provided, as well as information on the authors. Information on funding must be transparent. It must also be made clear that the study is being used in a PR context. The source must always be clearly identifiable. The provisions set out in paragraph I of this guideline also apply here.

(2) PR materials that do not meet the criteria set out in section III (1) must not be presented as scientific work, using terms such as 'studies', 'research' or 'surveys'. This applies even if they have been produced in collaboration with individual researchers or academic institutions.

(3) Of course, PR can create opportunities for media coverage or provide a rationale by presenting its own research and studies. Such publications may be described as white papers, corporate analyses, market analyses or customer satisfaction analyses, However, under no circumstances should be implied that these publications are equivalent to scientific publications. Nevertheless, the methodology and funding must be disclosed.

IV. Appendix Sources

10-Punkte-Plan der Allianz der deutschen Wissenschaftsorganisationen

Impulse des Siggener Kreises

Leitlinie evidenzbasierte Gesundheitsinformation von Vertreter:innen aus 22 Institutionen (u. a. Universität Hamburg, Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg) und Verbänden (u. a. EbM Netzwerk, G-BA) sowie drei Patientenvertreter:innen

Leitlinien für gute Wissenschafts-PR von Wissenschaft im Dialog und dem Bundesverband Hochschulkommunikation

Medien-Doktor als Projekt des Lehrstuhls Wissenschaftsjournalismus an der Technischen Universität Dortmund

Plattform Wissenschaftskommunikation.de

Positionspapier des Wissenschaftsrats zur Wissenschaftskommunikation

Last revised: 18.03.2026