Explaining Your Work to a Broader Audience

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Slides
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Presentation Summary

Introduction. The Monkey Cage is an online news analysis site hosted by The Washington Post. The pieces are written by political scientists, usually academics, for a non-academic audience. The 10 Monkey Cage editors, all political scientists, bring in content for the site. The associate editors take accepted articles and work with authors to create a compelling piece that will be accessible to a broad audience.

The Monkey Cage is one example of the many options academics now have to write for a broader digital audience. By sharing your expertise and becoming part of the wider discussion, you will be recognized as an expert in your field which benefits you, your department, and your university. If someone asks you to write on a topic, say yes!

New Digital Platforms. In our changing and expanding digital environment, there are many options for sharing your research with the public beyond blogs and op-eds. The Washington Post, for example, includes content from over 70 outside contributors, including The Monkey Cage. This type of "curated content" generally will have a much broader reach than a blog. While The Monkey Cage editors do not work for The Washington Post, all articles go through the Post's review process for copy editing, as well as libel and copyright reviews.

But digital media outlets need content, and many now look to outside experts to contribute timely pieces analyzing recent developments in the news, new research results, and related topics. Adding your voice to the discussion and debate will highlight your expertise, inform the public, and bring visibility to you and Georgetown.

Pitching Your Article. As you consider where to publish, be sure to read the instructions for authors on the websites you are considering to be sure that your piece is a good fit for the site. For example, The Monkey Cage publishes only research-based analysis and not opinion pieces.

When you approach a site's editors, send a pitch, not a completed article -- and not an abstract of your published work. In your pitch, pick one main topic that you want to write about and use two to three points to support it. Include an explanation of what you bring to the discussion of the topic and why your voice is unique and important.

It is always helpful to have a story with a news hook. If you know an event or anniversary of an event is coming, send your pitch in beforehand. Having advance notice of an article is better for both editors and authors, and your article can be ready to go when the event takes place.

Before sending your email, choose a good subject line that succinctly describes the topic of your article. Don't label it "Article idea," for instance.

Writing Your Article. Below are some tips on writing research-based articles for online sites.

Format
1. Think about organizing your piece as a "listicle," such as the "top 5 reasons" for _____.
2. Use subheads to help orient the reader to your analysis.
3. Use short links, not footnotes, to direct readers to a more in-depth discussions and analyses of key points you make*.*
4. Follow the site's guidelines, and pay attention to your word count. For many websites/outlets, an article of about 500-700 words might be the ideal place to start. If you need more than 1,000-1,500 words, then your topic is perhaps too big.
5. Stay out of the weeds. Focus on why your topic is important, rather than risk losing readers who may be less concerned with the backstory's full details, for instance.
6. Connect the dots. Be sure that you provide the appropriate context and explanation necessary for readers outside your field to understand your analysis. You can use links to other articles for readers to get understanding of concepts or events they may not be familiar with.
7. Check all your facts and figures to be sure they are correct.

Writing Style
1. Use the active voice.
2. Use punchy phrases that will catch the attention of the reader.
   ○ Example: "We expected the Brexit negotiations to do _____. That didn't happen." This will raise questions that readers will want to have answered: Why did that happen? What do I need to know about it?
3. Write shorter sentences and shorter paragraphs. About half of readers will be reading on their digital devices, and it is hard to follow a long paragraph on a small screen. Keeping your sentences and paragraphs short will also help readers who are distracted and doing other things while reading.
4. Be direct. Cut out unnecessary words, and simplify long words whenever possible.

Editing Process. Once your piece has been accepted, be open to suggestions from your editor! Your editor knows the site's audience and will work with you to create a piece that keeps your voice, yet maximizes the readability and impact of your article for a non-expert audience. This process will likely involve more than simple copy-editing, so be patient during the editing process -- and remember that editors are juggling multiple pieces and shifting news cycles.

After Publication.
1. Publicize your article by tweeting it out, sharing it with your colleagues and department, and adding links to your personal webpages.
2. Some sites, including Medium and LinkedIn (see below), will republish content from other sites. Check with your original publisher on their policies before posting your article on another site. The Monkey Cage, for example, asks for a 48-hour window, then full attribution and a link to the original post on The Washington Post site.
3. Share feedback on your article with your editor. Readers who might give feedback include policy makers, reporters, and others both at home and overseas. This is valuable information for your publisher and will provide depth and context to the quantitative statistics they have.

Digital Publishing Outlets for Your Work. Many digital sites seek new fresh content, so if you shop your work around, you are likely to find many audiences for your work.

Below are a few examples of sites that publish the work of academics;

- [The Monkey Cage](#)
  - The Monkey Cage's mission is to connect political scientists and the political conversation by creating a compelling forum, developing publicly focused scholars, and building an informed audience.
- [The Conversation](#)
  - The Conversation is an independent source of news and views from the academic and research community, delivered direct to the public.
- [Duck of Minerva](#)
  - The Duck of Minerva focuses on world politics from an academic perspective.
- [War on the Rocks](#)
  - War on the Rocks is a platform for analysis, commentary, debate and multimedia content on foreign policy and national security issues through a realist lens.
- [Made by History](#)
  - Made by History publishes historical analyses to situate the events making headlines in their larger historical context.
- [History News Network](#)
  - The History News Network's mission is to help put current events into historical perspective.
- [Medium](#)

- ○ Medium taps into the brains of the world's most insightful writers, thinkers, and storytellers to bring you the smartest takes on topics that matter.
- LinkedIn groups
- Department websites
- Association websites

Questions and Answers

Is it OK to pitch to multiple outlets?
Yes, if you let the editors know that you are shopping your work to multiple outlets in your initial inquiry. However, you will likely find editors less willing to look at your work if they have worked on a piece of yours, only to see you withdraw it because another outlet wished to publish it first. It is OK to ask, "Does this work for you?" and ask the outlet to let you know by XX time. The Monkey Cage editors, for instance, do try to answer every pitch and let the author know whether they are interested. If not, they will offer suggestions for other outlets that might be a good fit.

If I have a new scholarly article coming out, can I reframe it for a broader audience and submit it?
You can write about the research analyzed in a forthcoming article -- or a book. If the article is already out, ask the publisher to ungate it for a period of time, perhaps a month or more, so that readers can have easy access to the full scholarly article.

When you publish on The Monkey Cage or other sites, include links to your academic work so that interested readers can easily find your scholarly work.

What about the humanities? Are there sites that might be interested in publishing articles not tied to the news cycle? What strategies can humanists use?
There are connections between the humanities and the news cycle. For example, a recent article by a Russian Slavic studies professor explained a quote from Putin from a historical and linguistic point of view (*[Was Putin really blaming Jews for interfering in the U.S. election? Probably not.](#)*).

When is the best time to submit a piece?
The Monkey Cage follows the news cycle, but also tries to line up coverage of upcoming events, elections, international meetings, etc. Note: Submissions tend to be slow in August and December, so these can be great times to submit articles.

Does The Monkey Cage publish articles by graduate students?
Graduate students working on PhDs would be considered, but The Monkey Cage publishes fewer articles submitted by students in master's programs. There can be exceptions -- The Monkey Cage published an article by a high school student working with a faculty member.

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