

WRITE RESEARCH THAT GETS READ

PURPOSE

The information in this flyer helps researchers to shift beyond “writing to submit” towards “writing to be read” across a range of academic and non-academic outputs.

CONTRIBUTORS

Content is based on the workshop delivered for GACD in May 2026 by Ming Yang, Jieun Lee, and Megan Wilson-Jones.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW



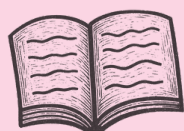
UNDERSTAND YOUR AUDIENCE FIRST

Understanding your audience is critical in implementation research outputs because the goal is not just to share knowledge, but to ensure that knowledge is used in practice. Creating audience profiles can be a helpful first step.



GO BEYOND THE DEFAULT

As well as peer-reviewed journal articles, researchers should consider alternative outputs best suited to the intended audience, such as social media, policy briefs, and impact case studies.



TELL A STORY WITH THE SCIENCE

People connect with stories, not just data. The goal is not to oversimplify, but to make it meaningful, memorable, and usable. Instead of listing findings, show the progression of thinking and discovery.



EXERCISE CAUTION WITH NEW TECHNOLOGY

AI and LLM tools are programs capable of generating, summarising, translating, and analysing text. While they numerous benefits, these may be weighed against concerns regarding data privacy, environmental impact, and that they cannot be regarded as co-authors.

Understand who you are writing for

PUT YOUR AUDIENCE FIRST

Understanding your audience is critical in implementation research outputs because the goal is not just to share knowledge, but to ensure that knowledge is used in practice. Without this understanding, even high-quality research risks being ignored or misapplied; with this understanding, research outputs become a practical tool for change.

USE AN AUDIENCE PROFILE

An audience profile is a simple, evidence-informed profile of your target audience that represents their needs, priorities, motivations, and constraints. It helps you move from “general public” or “policymakers” to a clear, specific reader.

HOW TO DEVELOP AN AUDIENCE PROFILE

- **Define the group clearly** – e.g. “national health ministers working on NCD policy” rather than “decision-makers”.
- **Gather insight** via stakeholder mapping, prior engagement, or published information about roles and priorities.
- **Identify key characteristics** – e.g., goals and responsibilities, knowledge level and familiarity with the topic, pressures (time, politics, resources), values and incentives.

- **Understand information habits** – e.g., how they prefer to receive information (briefs, data, stories) and what level of detail they need.
- **Clarify what action you want** and link your message directly to what they can realistically do.
- **Write a short profile** of four to six lines summarising who they are, what they need, and how to engage them.

EXAMPLE AUDIENCE PROFILE

Who? Regional public health policymakers responsible for planning and delivering population health programmes.

What? They need clear, evidence-based insights that inform decision-making within limited budgets and political constraints. They are familiar with high-level data but value concise summaries with practical implications. They prefer briefings that highlight impact, feasibility, and alignment with current policy priorities. To engage them, focus on actionable recommendations and local relevance.

Social media

Publishing your research is an achievement. Making sure people find, understand, and use it is the next step.

- Share key findings in simple, accessible formats (threads, short posts, visuals).
- Tailor your message to your audience.
- Post consistently and engage with responses to build visibility.

The most commonly used social media platforms worldwide are Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, and WeChat. Usage varies by geography and age group.

TOP TIPS FOR SOCIAL MEDIA

- Use plain language.
- Focus on one key message.
- Tell stories, not just findings.

EXAMPLE

A Our study explored implementation determinants across heterogeneous health systems.

versus

B Why do some health programmes succeed in one community but struggle in another?

Policy briefs

POLICY BRIEFS ARE...

- A tool to inform evidence-based policymaking.
- Simplifiers of research for non-specialised audiences.
- Elevators of specific issues.

AND ARE NOT...

- Academic papers.
- A summary of an academic paper.
- A research summary without clear links to policy.
- A promotional document.

A CLEAR PURPOSE AND AUDIENCE

A strong policy brief begins with a clear understanding of its purpose and audience. It should make a compelling case for why the issue is important and tailor its language, tone, and recommendations to a specific group of decision-makers.

A CLEAR STRUCTURE

1. A strong, engaging title draws attention.
2. Key messages and recommendations are presented upfront, often in a highlighted box, as this may be all that some readers review.
3. This is followed by concise context explaining the problem and its urgency, without excessive jargon.
4. The brief then outlines key findings and presents clear, actionable recommendations for different stakeholders.

FOR EACH POLICY OPTION OUTLINED IN THE BRIEF, CONSIDER INCLUDING...

- A concise, accurate description.
- The core advantages.
- The core disadvantages.
- The cost and feasibility of implementation, including acceptability and organisational factors.
- Equity considerations, including gender, socioeconomics, ethnicity, and geography.
- Responsibility of each stakeholder.

TARGET TIME-STRAPPED DECISION-MAKERS

Clarity and accessibility are essential. The intended readers (policymakers) are unlikely to have time to digest a comprehensive summary of your project.

Content should be concise, visually engaging, and easy to scan, using elements such as headings, boxes, and infographics to highlight key points.

DISSEMINATE TO MAXIMISE ENGAGEMENT

Effective dissemination of the brief is crucial and requires early planning regarding audience reach, timing, communication channels, and stakeholder strategies. Many cultures prefer oral briefings over written ones, and policy briefs are more impactful when used within established relationships with policymakers, facilitating discussions.

EXAMPLE POLICY BRIEFS FROM THE GACD RESEARCH NETWORK



PROJECT
SU02 SUNI-SEA: Scaling-up
NCD Interventions in South
East Asia

PUBLICATION DATE
2023

ACCESS
[SUNI-SEA Policy brief](#)



PROJECT
LD02 TB and Tobacco:
Tobacco cessation within TB
programmes

PUBLICATION DATE
2019

ACCESS
[TB & Tobacco Policy brief](#)

Case studies as stories of impact

GACD CASE STUDIES TELL STORIES OF IMPACT

They highlight where research evidence is helping to drive the changes necessary to tackle NCDs in different parts of the world, and share insights on what has enabled GACD project teams to have an impact.

THE PRIMARY AUDIENCE IS RESEARCHERS

The case studies also need to be accessible to non-scientific audiences including funders, policymakers, and the public.

THEIR PURPOSE IS TO SHOWCASE BEST PRACTICE AND IMPACT

The core aims of developing and disseminating impact case studies are:

- To share best practice examples that explore what approaches have worked or not worked to achieve impact and in doing so, to support future research.
- To showcase impact at conferences and events, through GACD social media channels, and the WHO Knowledge Action Portal.

EXAMPLES OF IMPACT

Within the timeframe of a GACD project, its impact is primarily policy and practice change.

Examples include:

- Strengthening national health systems - e.g., improving the delivery of an intervention, providing training to government health workers.
- Policy change and influencing national health programmes, strategies or guidelines.
- National governments endorsing programme scale up.
- Contributing to WHO priorities and technical packages.

TOP TIPS FOR WRITING A GACD IMPACT CASE STUDY

TELL A STORY

This is the key way in which case studies differ from academic publications. The purpose here is to tell a story and take the reader on a journey.

MINIMISE BACKGROUND

The background section sets the scene of why the issue is important and what the project is doing to address it, but we don't want to lose the reader.

SHOWCASE SIGNIFICANCE AND REACH

Describe the difference the research has made and to whom. This could be local, national and international impacts with a focus on policy and practice change.

HIGHLIGHT ENABLERS OF IMPACT

Share insights on what has enabled the project to have an impact, such as engagement with policymakers and other research users.

AVOID SCIENTIFIC JARGON

Although the primary audience is researchers, it is important to remember that not everyone is familiar with specific terminology. Case studies need to be accessible beyond the scientific community.

BRING IT TO LIFE VISUALLY

Carefully chosen photos, infographics, and charts can bring a case study to life. As the saying goes, a picture is worth a thousand words.

PUBLISH AT THE RIGHT MOMENT

Consider what stage the project is at and whether it is appropriate to develop a case study now or later. Projects that have completed or are nearly complete generally have the strongest impact stories to tell.

Peer-reviewed journal articles

TARGETING A JOURNAL

The biggest reason for desk rejection of a submission is being outside the scope and interests of the journal. Different journals have different priorities in what they publish.

Before submitting, review the journal's aims and scope, and look at their most recent publications to get a sense of their interests.

TARGETING A JOURNAL EDITOR

When reviewing a submission, journal editors consider:

- How well the submission aligns with the journal's scope.
- Conceptual elements, including novelty and innovation in methods, results, or insights, plus the potential impact on public health and policy.
- Compliance with editorial policies concerning ethics, study reporting, and reproducibility.
- Verify that the conclusions are substantiated by the data provided.

TIPS FOR YOUR COVER LETTER

This is your opportunity to speak directly with the editor, so emphasise why you have selected this journal and how your paper fits with the scope.

- Keep it short.
- Do not repeat all the findings.
- Do provide:
 - Context in the field.
 - Level of advance.
 - How it fits with the journal.
- Explicitly acknowledge the submission is not under consideration elsewhere.

TARGETING A JOURNAL'S READERSHIP

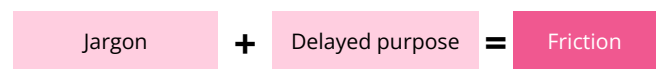
To start, review the journal's usual readership – who are you writing for and what is their implicit knowledge on the topic?

BEGIN WITH A STRONG TITLE

The title should be accurate, brief, and clear. Avoid questions, puns, and metaphors.

HOOK THE READERS EARLY

Most people will not read past the title and abstract. It is especially important that these components are accessible and generate momentum to continue reading.



INCREASE COMPLEXITY AS YOU GO

As you move through the title, to the abstract, to the main text, the complexity of your writing can increase. However, it is good practice to convey the complexity with minimal use of acronyms and avoid jargon.

Lastly, communicate the conceptual advance – how does your work compare with previous literature? What is the public health or policy impact of your work?

SALAMI SLICING

With the academic system incentivising manuscript publication, it can be tempting to report a study with as many papers as possible, each reporting the 'smallest publishable unit'.

So-called 'salami slicing' may be entirely justified in some situations, particularly if each 'slice' reports on a different hypothesis. However, salami slicing can also conceal valuable conclusions that may only be derived if the data are presented as a whole.

Researchers should consider carefully how much, or little, to publish in one paper. [Menon and Muraleedharan \(2016\)](#).

Storytelling with science

People connect with stories, not just data. With science storytelling, the goal is not to oversimplify, but to make it meaningful, memorable, and usable.

Instead of listing findings, show the progression of thinking and discovery:

- What problem triggered the research?
- What was uncertain or challenging?
- What did you do to explore it?
- What did you find, step by step?
- What does this mean in practice?

FOR EXAMPLE...

RESULTS WITHOUT A STORY

"Use of the digital tool improved data completeness by 40%. Staff reported usability challenges. Training increased adoption."

RESULTS CRAFTED INTO A JOURNEY

"Primary care teams were expected to use a new digital tool, but early data showed inconsistent uptake and incomplete records. This raised a key question: what is getting in the way of routine use?"

"Through interviews and observations, staff highlighted two main issues: unclear workflows and difficulty navigating the interface. We then co-developed a short training session and simplified guidance with frontline teams.

"Following this, use of the tool became more consistent and data completeness improved by 40%. This suggests that adoption was less about willingness and more about practical usability, pointing to the importance of embedding tools into real-world workflows."

AI and Large Language Model (LLM) tools

AI and LLM tools are a fast-evolving technology. Indeed, this flyer will be out of date by the time it is published!

AI and LLM tools are programs that can generate, summarise, translate, and parse text in multiple contexts. Examples include ChatGPT, Microsoft CoPilot, and Google Gemini.

Considerations:

- There is no guarantee of data privacy for any information you upload.
- They can get facts wrong (called 'hallucinations').

- They are susceptible to inheriting and amplifying biases present in their training data.
- Use is associated with substantial [environmental impacts](#).
- No LLM tool will be accepted as a credited author on a research paper by [Nature Medicine](#) (and likely others), as authorship carries accountability for the work, and AI tools cannot take such responsibility.
- LLM tool use should be documented in your output.

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