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July.22.2024

How research-based news articles (like this one) accelerate research impact

By Marg Rogers

Translating research findings into practice or policy change is notoriously slow despite the time, effort and funding invested in research. In my peer reviewed journal article and presentation about research-based news articles, I give a step-by-step guide on how to write effectively for these research news sites to create impact and accelerate knowledge translation (also called research translation).

I also argue that while our institutions benefit and encourage us to engage in such research translation, they should recognise the time it takes to write and publish for these sites in our workloads. Further, institutions need to ensure their employment and promotion systems reward the efforts required for this type of research translation and stakeholder engagement. If these systems do not keep up, institutions risk reducing the potential impact of their research as researchers juggle their time.

Why bother with news articles?

Researchers have many demands within their institutions. Any investment in time to write research-based news articles (RBNAs) needs to be justified with important reasons. Firstly, in education, the translation of research into practice has been debated for a long time, with a large lag in uptake due to poor access to research findings and the high workloads of our target educators.

Secondly, many of our stakeholders do not necessarily have access to peer-reviewed papers. They are often exhausted from supporting children's and student's learning. For example, in my area of wellbeing research, my stakeholders are regional, rural and remote educators, support workers and parents. They are all busy groups of people.

Thirdly, although policymakers might have access to research libraries, they are also time-poor, wading through an increasing number of peer-reviewed publications.

Fourthly, in an information-rich environment, it is difficult for researchers to cut through the noise and have their research read, understood and put into practice.

Fifthly, RBNAs allow researchers to link their peer-reviewed publications. That ensures stakeholders who want more information are able to easily access their work.

Lastly, excellent research occurs in our universities and research institutes. But it is often only partially used because it is only accessed by other academics. Translating knowledge through RBNAs is one way to reduce such waste.

Research impact: **benefits of RBNAs**

There are many benefits of publishing RBNAs. This format allows researchers to summarise their research into snack-sized, easily digestible articles of around 600-1200 words available to the general public. Also, professionals working in the field might use the findings to inform their practice and decisions or increase their understanding and awareness of issues impacting their work. Researchers benefit by having a wider audience engage with their research, either by reading the RBNA or clicking on hyperlinks to their other research outputs. These metrics can be tracked using Altmetrics.which can be reported in funding, job and promotion applications as proof of stakeholder engagement and community service. Additionally, the researcher's work is more likely to be noticed by media outlets, which might request further articles or interviews. This engagement further increases stakeholder and public engagement.

Understanding how RBNAs work

In my journal article, I use a new framework. It shows how RBNAs work and how researchers adapt their skills to write them using news values. Using a fishing analogy, shown in Figure 1, I explain the differences between RBNAs and writing opinion pieces in a newspaper.
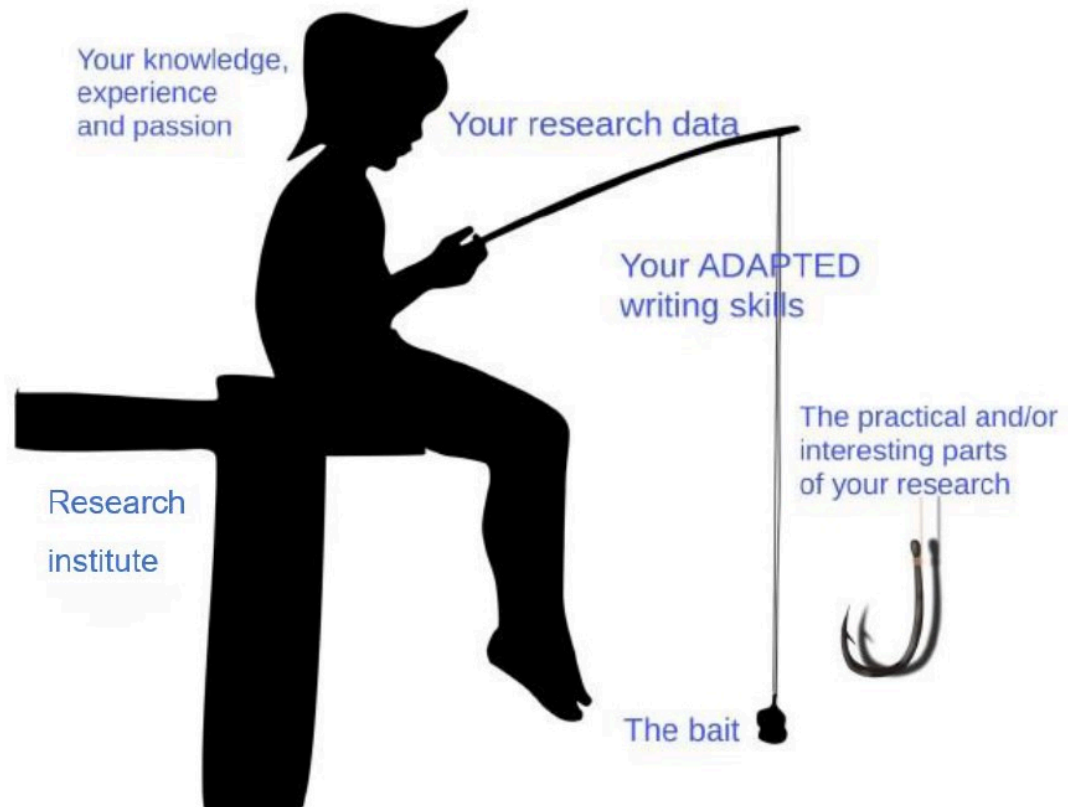
Figure 1: *Framework to explore RBNAs (Source: Rogers, 2024)*

RBNAs are based on your research, using the platform of your institution as an authority and vantage point. Your academic knowledge, experience and passion are used as a fisherperson uses their knowledge to hunt fish.

Your research data and project become the fishing rod, skilfully moved and positioned to create impact. Importantly, the fishing line is stretched and adapted to accommodate the fish and conditions, just as you need to expand and adapt your writing style for different news sites. These articles are not mini essays, so this requires a definite shift in your style, language and tone.

The fishing hook is the engaging and practical part of your research. This can be tricky for researchers to identify because they might find all parts of their research interesting. Most readers will not share your fascination with theories and methodology. Working with your institution's media and communication officers can be a big help here.

The most important part of your article is the bait. How will you lure your readers to your article? The easiest way to do this is to use news values that journalists use as shown in Figure 2 .

Impact	•Is it of interest to the intended audience?
Proximity	•Is it relatable to the intended audience?
Timeliness	•Does it relate to special days, anniversaries or events?
Prominence	•How much media attention is the issue currently receiving?
Conflict	•Is it showing conflict, such as global or interpersonal?
Human interest	•Is the story touching?
Novelty or oddity	•Is the story about something unusual?

Figure 2: News values (adapted from Harcup & O'Neill [2017], and Parks [2019]).

How to write, publish and disseminate RBNAs

Work with your media and communication team in a professional way. Let them know about your research and identify stakeholders. They are skilful at finding news sites for your particular area. For my early childhood education and family wellbeing research, these news sites include *EduResearch Matters*, *The Sector*, *EducationHQ*, *The Conversation*, *Partyline*, *Women's Agenda*, *The Spoke*, and my own institution's *UNE School of Education Research Newsletter*.

When drafting an RBNA or pitching an idea to an editor, frontload a one-sentence summary of your findings and place it in the first paragraph. (As an example, scroll up to look at the second sentence of this current RBNA). The first paragraph, headline and lead image need to work together to grab the audience's attention.

This technique differs

This writing technique is quite different to an academic article or a mystery novel. The reader does not have to wade through to the end to find the punchline. Your style will need to change depending on the news site, so read some articles from your targeted site.

Use simple, everyday English without jargon and clearly explain technical terms. Use sub-headings and images to guide the reader. Your media and communications officers can read through drafts, and offer suggested edits.

Ensure you work with these colleagues and the news site editor collaboratively. Respect their journalism skills, and remember they are knowledgeable in their field. They are experts in style, tone, images, and importantly, what readers will (and will not) engage with. They know how to adapt your research to fit with news values.

Your content knowledge, combined with their journalistic expertise, can be a match made in heaven, provided you are willing to learn from them. When this happens, your stakeholders win.

To disseminate your RBNA widely, work with your media and communications team to do this through social media. Republish your article to other relevant news sites when this option is available. Learn from colleagues who have large social media followings by watching and

imitating what they do. Be sure to tag your research colleagues, partners and funders when posting a link to your article.

Research impact – **Challenges for academics**

The Australian Universities Accord Final Report says there is a need to expand 'government support for research translation'. But academics work in an increasingly time-pressured environment. They face increasing administrative pressures due to managerial-inspired systems and software that encourage research record keeping and compliance over innovation, creativity, stakeholder engagement and actual research.

Recognising the challenges, early career researchers, Granek and Nakash, explain:

As junior academics in vulnerable (i.e., pre-tenure) positions, we are well aware of the fact that it is easier to answer the question of why do [knowledge translation] KT than how to do KT given the very real academic constraints … the reality of a neoliberal academic climate that rewards publications and grants at the expense of the time and energy spent on the other kinds of KT initiatives … cannot be ignored. We work in a particular sociopolitical context that values some kinds of knowledge over others.

While institutions are often good at listing these activities in organisational narratives, they need to support this work in a practical way. Such activities must be valued and acknowledged in academic systems and workload agreements.

It's time to value all the work researchers do to ensure our whole society benefits from our research.
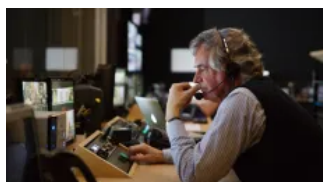
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