



REVIEW

More than dissemination: making research communication a creative practice

Reviewed Book

Wilkinson, C., & Weitkamp, E. (2025).
Creative Research Communication: Theory and Practice (2nd edition).
Manchester University Press.

Reviewed by

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Abstract

This review examines the second edition of *Creative Research Communication* by Clare Wilkinson and Emma Weitkamp. The updated edition provides a comprehensive introduction to research communication, combining theoretical perspectives with practical guidance. It covers topics such as public engagement, digital communication, policy engagement, inclusivity, professionalisation and generative AI. The review discusses the book's contribution as an accessible and timely resource for researchers, students and communication professionals.

Keywords

Science writing; Science communication: theory and models; Popularization of science and technology

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Research communication has never been more visible — or more contested. From climate change and public health emergencies to generative artificial intelligence and the rapid spread of misinformation, researchers are increasingly expected not only to produce knowledge but also to communicate it effectively to diverse audiences. Communication is also becoming central to research governance itself, shaping public engagement, policy development and institutional accountability. Against this backdrop, the second edition of *Creative Research Communication* arrives at an opportune moment. Clare Wilkinson and Emma Weitkamp set themselves an ambitious goal: to provide an accessible introduction to contemporary research communication for researchers, students, communication professionals and practitioners working across a wide range of disciplines.

The book succeeds remarkably well. It combines historical perspective, conceptual discussion and practical guidance in a volume that is simultaneously comprehensive, highly readable and immediately useful. Rather than presenting communication as a final stage in the research process, Wilkinson and Weitkamp consistently portray it as an integral component of research itself — one that shapes relationships between researchers, participants, policymakers and wider publics.

The book is organised into three parts. The opening section introduces the historical and conceptual foundations of research communication, tracing the evolution of communication practices from early public lectures and learned societies to contemporary ideas of public engagement, participation and dialogue. It also examines changing understandings of audiences, publics and participants, reflecting the field's movement beyond deficit-oriented models towards more interactive forms of communication. These chapters provide newcomers with a concise but thoughtful introduction to the development of the field while also reminding experienced practitioners that contemporary debates have deep historical roots.

The central part of the book forms its practical core. Here the authors survey an impressive range of communication approaches, including face-to-face engagement, artistic collaborations, digital communication, policy engagement and participatory research. Throughout, the emphasis remains firmly on helping readers think critically about matching communication approaches to audiences, purposes and contexts rather than prescribing universal solutions. The second edition substantially updates this section. The previous standalone chapter on social media has been integrated into a broader chapter on digital communication, reflecting today's more interconnected digital landscape while incorporating discussion of generative artificial intelligence. A new chapter on inclusivity similarly responds to growing recognition that effective research communication requires careful attention to diversity, accessibility and participation.

The final section turns to broader questions concerning impact, ethics, dissemination and the professionalisation of research communication. Rather than treating communication simply as a vehicle for disseminating research findings, the authors encourage readers to consider how communication activities should themselves be evaluated, shared and reflected upon as scholarly and professional practice. The new chapter on professionalisation is a particularly timely addition, reflecting the maturation of research communication as an increasingly recognised area of expertise. Ethical questions surrounding participation, consent, advocacy and responsibility are integrated throughout, reinforcing the book's broader message that communication involves judgement as much as technique.

One conceptual aspect deserves brief comment. Wilkinson and Weitkamp consistently employ the term research communication rather than the more familiar science communication. This reflects a growing preference among many English-speaking scholars and practitioners for a term that encompasses communication across the sciences, social sciences, humanities and the arts [Cassidy, 2021]. The book itself clearly embraces this broader perspective. Nevertheless, international readers may have appreciated a more explicit discussion of this terminological choice and its relationship to science communication, which continues to function as the dominant umbrella concept in much international scholarship and remains the principal intellectual tradition upon which many of the book's discussions draw. A short reflection on the relationship between these terms would have helped situate the book more clearly within an internationally diverse field.

The book's greatest strength, however, lies not simply in its breadth but in its practicality. Every chapter contains examples, case studies, suggested activities, online resources and extensive further reading that encourage readers to explore communication approaches for themselves. The writing is consistently clear and engaging, making sophisticated ideas accessible without oversimplifying them. The authors strike an effective balance between introducing theoretical concepts and providing concrete advice that readers can readily adapt to their own institutional settings and disciplinary contexts. The result is a book that functions equally well as an introductory textbook, a teaching resource and a practical handbook for researchers seeking to develop their communication practice.

If there is one area where the book leaves the reader wanting more, it concerns the concept that appears most prominently in its title: creativity. One of the book's central contributions is precisely its insistence that research communication should not be understood as the simple dissemination or translation of completed research. Instead, communication is presented as an inherently creative practice involving collaboration, experimentation, participation and the design of new forms of interaction. This is an important and welcome perspective.

Surprisingly, however, creativity itself receives relatively little sustained conceptual attention. The opening chapter briefly introduces influential perspectives from Margaret Boden and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, while the concluding chapter returns to creativity as a possible means of navigating tensions surrounding impact, evaluation and institutional expectations. Beyond these discussions, however, creativity functions more as an inspiring aspiration than as an analytical concept.

A richer discussion might have strengthened the volume further. Creativity is rarely free from competing demands [Potočník et al., 2022]. Creative approaches to research communication must balance novelty and usefulness: innovative formats should remain understandable, relevant and accessible; experimentation must coexist with reliability; and institutional expectations for measurable impact may conflict with openness, participation and genuine dialogue. Contemporary creativity research increasingly suggests that creativity emerges not despite these competing demands but through different ways of balancing or integrating them [Harvey & Berry, 2023]. Exploring these tensions more explicitly would have complemented the book's otherwise nuanced treatment of research communication and reinforced its central argument that communication involves ongoing judgement rather than the application of fixed techniques.

This reservation is ultimately a minor one. *Creative Research Communication* succeeds admirably in demonstrating that communication is no longer a peripheral activity undertaken

once research has finished but a central component of contemporary research practice. Thoroughly updated for a rapidly evolving landscape, the second edition is comprehensive, accessible and exceptionally practical, and will undoubtedly consolidate the book's position as a leading introductory text for students, researchers and communication professionals alike. Even readers already familiar with the field will find numerous new ideas, examples and resources that stimulate reflection on their own practice. A richer conceptual engagement with creativity itself would have strengthened what is already one of the most useful and engaging introductions to research communication currently available.

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