



Being clear without becoming *wrong*

BEHIND THE WORK • GEORGIA MICHAEL, PHD

The better you understand something, the harder it can be to explain it well.

It's a recognized effect: the *curse of knowledge*.

As MIT Sloan puts it, experts are often poorer communicators in their own field than nonexperts.

They disappear into the detail, assume context that isn't shared, and forget what it was like not to know.

Walsh D. The curse of knowledge: Why experts struggle to explain their work.
<https://mitsloan.mit.edu/ideas-made-to-matter/curse-knowledge-why-experts-struggle-to-explain-their-work>

Communication, in 3 steps:

Encode

an idea into words or images



Transmit

it to others



Decode

the other person interprets it

One mind encodes. Many different minds decode.

What feels obvious to an expert is often read quite differently by everyone else.

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Write for *your* audience.

Medical communicators turn dense clinical and scientific evidence into something a patient, clinician, biotech or pharma professional, investor, or payer can actually use.

The catch: each of them needs that same evidence shaped *differently*.

Not one summary that suits everyone. The same truth, recast for each, without bending it.

There are 2 ways to lose your audience.

Pitch above them, and the message doesn't land.

However strong the evidence underneath, if people can't follow it, they won't see its value.

Pitch too low, and you mislead. Strip out the caveats and you've quietly changed what the evidence actually says.

The skill is the narrow space between: *as simple as it can be without becoming untrue.*

Christina Zarcadoolas, The simplicity complex: exploring simplified health messages in a complex world, Health Promotion International, Volume 26, Issue 3, September 2011, Pages 338–350, <https://doi.org/10.1093/heapro/daq075>

How something is delivered can matter as much as what it says.

A report, a conversation, a one-page summary, a slide deck, a short video, an infographic, a podcast, a social post, each carries the same evidence differently, and suits a different audience.

The research backs this up: format and channel *shape* whether a message lands, not just the vocabulary.

Bauder L, Giangobbe K, Asgary R. Barriers and Gaps in Effective Health Communication at Both Public Health and Healthcare Delivery Levels During Epidemics and Pandemics; Systematic Review. Disaster Medicine and Public Health Preparedness. 2023;17:e395. doi:10.1017/dmp.2023.61