

Clear-Writing Workshop

November 14, 21, and 28

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Outline

Day 1: Knowing your audience, avoiding jargon, using the active voice

Day 2: Writing concisely, communicating uncertainty, making good comparisons, giving feedback

Day 3: Giving feedback (peer review session), keeping your readers happy

What would you like covered?

Conciseness for different audiences.

Knowing what to chop for the audience

Why is clear writing important?

- Reflects your competency. ✓ Will take more seriously.
- Sharing info, getting feedback
- Part of the collaboration process
- Essential for survival. → grants
↳ future research → published
↳ jobs.
- Public has paid for a lot of research
- What was the point? Why relevant? Awareness
- Potential for misinterpretation is high

Audiences of scientific information

Oil sands development contributes elements toxic at low concentrations to the Athabasca River and its tributaries

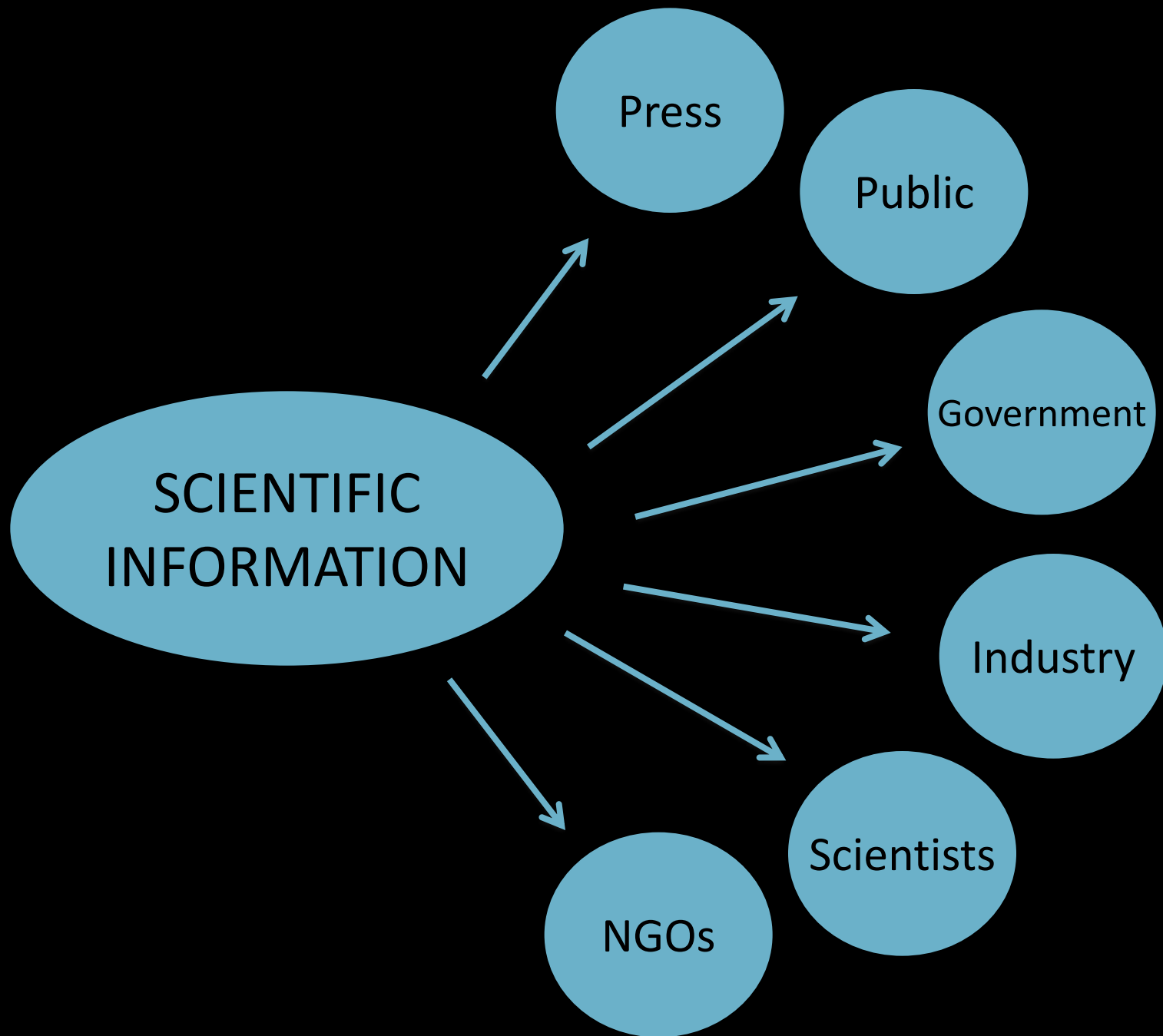
Erin N. Kelly, David W. Schindler, Peter V. Hodson, Jeffrey W. Short, Roseanna Radmanovich, and Charlene C. Nielsen

→ *Who would be interested in this information? Who needs this information?*

→ *What questions would each audience have about this information?*

Audiences for this research?

- Law-makers / enforcers.
- Anyone nearby
 - ↳ downstream
 - ↳ downwind
- fishing
- First Nation pop.
- politicians.
- public → lobby
- Anyone near potential future similar developments
- Other scientists, ecologists in the area, healthcare community
- Industry
 - ↳ direct
 - ↳ indirect
- Environmental groups, non-profits, NGOs, activists.
- Gov. agencies



Press

What questions do the media have?

How does this affect my readers? Health?
What was the motivation?
Does it break any rules?

Validity of experiment
Historical / -Affiliations of authors

Value of the development

How does it affect revenue?

Did the industry already know
what do the ^{or agencies} numbers mean?

Oilsands mining linked to Athabasca River toxins

Results point to 'serious defects' in monitoring program, study says

Last Updated: Monday, August 30, 2010 | 10:49 PM ET CBC News



Oilsands mining linked to river toxins 2:32



Athabasca river study 6:08

High levels of toxic pollutants in Alberta's Athabasca River system are linked to oilsands mining, researchers have found.

The findings counter the reports by a joint industry-government panel that the pollutant levels are due to natural sources rather than human development.

Mercury, thallium and other pollutants accumulated in higher concentrations in snowpacks and waterways near and downstream from oilsands development than in more remote areas, said a study to be published Monday afternoon in the



Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.



Internal Links

- IN DEPTH: Oilsands: Black gold or black eye?
- Oilsands impact on water needs study: Liberals
- Alberta defends oilsands in ads
- Oilsands database shows chronic pollution
- Scientist apologizes to oilsands

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Top News Headlin



- B.C. avalanche team r
- Northern Ontario pipe
- Flames blank Canadi

Public

What questions does the public have?

- Health impacts / env. impacts.
- What will industry do?
- How was this allowed? → how was it monitored?
- What can people do? Town hall meetings.
- What other information is missing?
- Follow-up studies?
- Context for the numbers. / background.

Public



Photo: littlevanities via flickr



Public

So many of the issues we confront have to do with science, and if people aren't informed, they can't be good citizens.

Cornelia Dean, science writer and former science editor at *The New York Times*

What questions do policy makers have?

- What rules were broken
- monitoring?
- How will it affect - re-election?
 - fundraising?
- what kind of restoration?
- Does it always happen or could it be avoided?
- Will it affect demand? Price?
 - Can we improve methods?

Oilsands water data worth examining: Stelmach

'If it means that we have to do something more, we will,' premier says

Last Updated: Wednesday, September 1, 2010 | 10:17 PM ET CBC News



Stelmach comments on oilsands water study 1:30

Alberta Premier Ed Stelmach said Wednesday his government will compare newly published data from the University of Alberta with research already done by government scientists on the impact of oilsands development on the Athabasca River.

In his first public comments about the results



since they were released Monday, Stelmach said he respects study co-author David Schindler and his research and believes scientists should compare methods and



Internal Links

- Oilsands pollution findings conflict: Prentice
- Oilsands water toxins natural, monitor says
- Oilsands mining linked to Athabasca River toxins

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Top News Headlines



- B.C. avalanche tea
- Northern Ontario p
- Flames blank Can

Industry

What questions does industry have?

Do we have to pay for it?

How the study done? → To find a failure

How are the researchers funded?

Demand? Price?

How were the levels set? Is it fair?

Additional health info? Realistic?

Scientists

What questions do scientists have?

Heavy metal toxicity background?

How the work was done. methods, sample,

Seasonality of findings?

Long-term impacts. / future

How much greater were the concentrations.
Range.

NGOs

What questions do NGOs have?

- Impact | factors?
- If related to their agenda.
- Resp. of gov. and industry.
- Similar to investigative journalists
↳ The question words.

NGOs

David
Suzuki
Foundation

SOLUTIONS ARE IN OUR NATURE

ABOUT US

ISSUES ▼

WHAT YOU CAN DO

✕ Sign up for our newsletter and get the latest environmental news and green-living tips in your inbox.

Blogs

Climate & Clean Energy

Docs Talk

Healthy Oceans

Notes from the Panther
Lounge

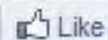
Queen of Green

Science Matters

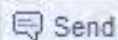
Suzuki Elders

Is there a cancer threat from the oil sands industry?

April 19, 2011 | Posted in Elderview | 5 comments



Like



Send



27 people like this.

By Peggy Olive

Those of us who watched "Tipping Point: The Age of the Oil Sands" on The Nature of Things at the end of Januaryⁱ are legitimately concerned by this question. Kelly and Schindler, writing in the [scientific journal](#)

[Proceedings](#) of the National Academy of Sciences,ⁱⁱ provided evidence that mining





Press

Is it news?

Public

Why does it matter to me? What can I do about it? How should I vote?

Government

What, if any, policies need to be changed, added, or removed based on the info? What do my voters think about the issue?



Industry

How will it affect operations? Will it solve problems? Or does it create problems? Will it cost us?

Scientists

How does it relate to my work? Do the methods seem appropriate? Do the results contradict current thinking? What is the magnitude of impact.

NGOs

How does it fit our agenda, if at all? What is the impact on environment/people?

Adjustments for your audience?

- analogy

- Use hyperlinking
- need background context
- making sure you answer questions they would have.

- Reason the read.

RELEVANCE

- more of a story.

- Names of researchers.

- simpler

- less technical.

- elim. jargon.

Jargon activity

How do you identify jargon?

Which do you prefer?

The fish were weighed by me on weighing scales every week.

I weighed the fish on weighing scales every week.

Which do you prefer?

Marta's participation in the writing workshops was acknowledged by her supervisor.

Marta's supervisor acknowledged her participation in the writing workshops.

Which do you prefer?

The chemical mixture was poured carefully into beakers, before it was stirred and transferred to an ice bath.

We carefully poured the chemical mixture into beakers before we stirred and transferred it to an ice bath.

Active vs. passive voice

Why use the active voice?

- Shorter.
- Easier to understand
- More energetic

Active vs. passive voice

When is it inappropriate to use the active voice?

1. Focus on person or thing being acted on ✓
2. Actor unknown
3. Speculating

Questions from today?

Next week

Please bring **THREE COPIES** of one-page research summary

Summaries exchanged with two other participants
(I will keep the other copy)

Housekeeping: Who will not be here both week 2 and week 3?

Writing toolkit (so far!)

Know your audience!

Avoid jargon!

Use the active voice! (when appropriate)