

A guide to effective communications

Communication is most effective when it's carefully planned and targeted. So before you get started on a print project it's worth spending some time thinking about who you're communicating with and what you want to achieve.

Know your audience

Your audience is key when planning your communication, so try to gather as much information as you can about their needs. If your communication is intended for a large external audience, do you have access to any market insight that would help you better understand their needs and motivations? This information will help guide the content you include, as well as the tone of voice and format you use to deliver that content e.g. print, email, web, social media campaign, video, etc.

Consider your aims

Do you want to inform, engage, or to inspire action or opinion change? Think about what you want your audience(s) to think, feel or do when they read, see or interact with the content, e.g. apply for a course, be proud to be part of a worthwhile project, register for an event, form an opinion, help to raise awareness of a fundraising campaign, or visit a website. Keep your goals in mind when you're reviewing each stage of your print project to ensure that what you're producing will deliver on those aims.

Decide on your core messages

What key points do you want your audience to take away? This may be related to what you want them to do (e.g. I need to nominate my lecturer for a teaching excellence award by the deadline), or it may be more nuanced (perhaps as well as nominating someone for WATE you also want your audience to be aware of Warwick's collaborative approach to teaching and learning, for example).

For a longer print document or a large marketing campaign, there may be a number of themes that each require different messages, but focus on a few key points rather than trying to say so many things that your audience don't remember your messages. Make a note of these messages to guide your content.

Consider tone and language

Your tone will be directed by your audience. We've developed guidance on [tone of voice for marketing communications](#). Communicating internally or with the media will require a slightly different approach. But regardless of your audience, there are some overarching principles that apply:

- Use language that is clear and concise
- Maintain consistency in tone and terms of reference – read more about [Warwick's house style](#)
- Speak collaboratively – if possible address the reader directly and use the first person to refer to your department/the University/whoever the communication is coming from
- Use an active rather than a passive voice e.g. 'we reviewed' rather than 'a review has been completed'. Using passive references distances you from your audience.

If you'd like more guidance and tips on using the written word to promote Warwick to our stakeholders, why not sign up for our [Writing for Warwick](#) sessions, offered through the Learning Development Centre.

Know your timescale

Be practical about what is achievable in the time you have and produce a project plan of what needs to be done when, working back from the date by which you need the finished communication to be ready for your audience to see. Remember to factor in time for any stakeholders to review your content and provide feedback, and ask them to put aside some time at that point. This will avoid delays that might impact on your delivery/go live date.

Evaluate you communication

Before you start the project, decide what will be the success criteria that show your communication has had the desired impact. This will tie-in closely to your initial aims. It may be clicks on a website, number of people signing up for something or the number of people who engage with your social media content.

For a larger piece of communication, consider carrying out research in the form of a survey or focus group(s) to understand more about how your audience responded. How did the communication make them feel? Did they do anything after reading/seeing it? What did they like about it? Was there anything they would have changed? Etc. This will help to inform your future communications. For more information about carrying out research, visit our [market insight](#) pages.

Need more detailed information about a specific project?

We've put together some tips for making the best use of different communications channels, along with contact information for our specialist teams who can provide more support.

What do you want to do?

- [Create a print document](#)
- [Request a logo](#)
- [Get copywriting advice or training](#)
- [Create a video/organise a photo shoot](#)
- [Create content for a web page/website](#)
- [Find out more about you audience/market \(including new course development\)](#)
- [Use/set up Social media account](#)
- [Generate creative ideas for a campaign/comms approach](#)
- [Plan a wider marketing campaign](#)
- [Contact and liaise with local dignitaries](#)
- [Communicate with current students](#)
- [Get support with media relations](#)
- [Develop staff communications](#)