

Choosing Your Audience

Knowing who you want to share your research with is just as important as determining what you'd like to research. Choosing a target audience early in your mentorship helps guide your voice, content, and communication mode; in other words, it helps you choose the final project that will best communicate your work!

Planning out your mentorship goals isn't always a straightforward process. Sometimes your research topic will be completely clear (e.g. you have always wanted to learn more about the physics of black holes), and other times your communication goals will lead your thinking (e.g. you want to write an OpEd). You'll always need both components to plan out your work, so here we'll discuss what is involved in considering your audience and communication method. Since everyone starts at a different point, we've created headings so you can skip to the information that is most relevant to you right now. Remember, from project to project, you might change too, so you won't always be starting from the same point!

I don't know how to choose my audience

If you have a research topic or question already, close your eyes and imagine yourself discussing your project with someone. Where are you? Who are you talking to? Are you at a conference hall? A school classroom? A community event? Take note of the setting, and the person you're communicating with.

If you don't already know what you want to research, stop now, and first check out our resource on "Creating a Research Question." Otherwise, take a moment to reflect on why you are starting your current research project. Do you want to share information that is useful to a group? Do you want to present research that will open doors for you, introduce you to a group of people you aren't already familiar with? Take an honest look at your motivations for doing your research project, then think about what audiences are the best match.

If you are still feeling stumped, give some thought as to which demographics you care about; you can always plan backwards from the group of people you've



decided you'd like to communicate your findings with. To kickstart your brainstorming process, check out these demographic categories and descriptors to see if any of them jump out at you, or provoke a strong feeling:

- **Age:** young, old, middle-age, teen-age, pubescent, senior citizen
- **Economic class:** below poverty level, near poverty level, lower/upper middle class, upper class, 1%
- **Educational attainment:** no/some high school, some high school, some college, college degree, advanced degree, specialized/trade training, current student
- **Legal status:** undocumented person, immigrant, citizen, formerly incarcerated, ex-felon, imprisoned, minor, ward of the state
- **Labor status:** unemployed, underemployed, union member, non-unionized, professional, at-will employment, freelance
- **Health status:** healthy, fair health, unwell, chronically ill, acutely ill

Of course, there are many other ways to describe your potential audience - are you targeting your peers or school administrators? You should feel free to use other sources of inspiration to find a group you'd like to share your work with. Consider exploring market research online for "customer persona" and "target audience," or jot down some probable assumptions, values, or beliefs an imaginary audience member might have.

I know my audience, but don't know how I want to communicate with them

If you already know who you would like to share your research with, congratulations! Your next step is to flesh out your picture of who will be reading/consuming your information. Make sure you know the answers to the following questions:

- What does my audience know (or think they know) about my subject matter?
- What is my audience expecting to learn from my project/report?
- How am I going to keep/hold their interest? Or how am I going to fulfill their expectations?
- How am I going to help my audience understand my message?

Once you've answered these questions, it should start to become clear that some forms of communication will be more appropriate for your audience than others. If you're still struggling to come up with a communication tool or product, take a look at our partial list below for inspiration:



literature review

portfolio

video curriculum

content creation

Worksheet

opinion essay

policy brief

infographic

research paper

blog

talk/lecture

poster

toolkit

podcast

But don't take our word for it, use this list as a starting point—your only limit is your creativity. If you want to facilitate cultural exchange by creating a cookbook, go for it! Want to engage math-shy students in geometry with a lesson plan on origami? The sky's the limit!

I've already chosen my communication style, but don't know my audience

Perhaps you have chosen to complete a research project because you have always wanted to learn how to write a policy brief, or you want to create and share a presentation to get over your fear of public speaking. You are committed to a particular communication style or product, but you're less certain of who you should be presenting to.

Your Program Coach can be a great resource in this instance, but if you want to try to sort things on your own, there are a few ways to approach the problem:

1. Take a moment to envision your final product in your minds' eye, exactly as you want it to be. Now zoom out and see where that work exists. If it is an art exhibit, put yourself and your works in a space and walk through it. Or if it is a written product, see someone reading it, viewing it, considering it. Who is the person looking, listening to, reading, viewing or experiencing your work? Identify the person and start filling out what you know about them, their opinions, interests, beliefs, and motivations. This is your audience.
2. Consider how different groups of people consume information/learn the best. You can do an internet search using your final project form, for example search "podcast learning demographics" to find out what audience will be the most receptive to the podcast series you've been wanting to create. If you're committed to curating a collection of health and wellness tips to share with senior citizens, a quick demographics search will help you realize



that you might need to let go of the idea of generating content for a TikTok channel, or change your intended audience to the groups that use it the most often.

I've got my audience in mind, and know how I'm going to communicate with them

At this point, you are ready to start working on your mentorship plan with your Program Coach and mentor. In the ideal case, you will have all the specifics laid out so you know exactly where you're going to share your final work, and what requirements you'll need to meet in order to have that work accepted and shared. If you are planning to share your results broadly, you will need to spend more time in the beginning figuring out what is required to successfully do so.

You may want to jump right into your research, but it will save you time (and heartache) if you start knowing where you should finish. If you want to publish your work, discuss appropriate outlets with your Program Coach and mentor. Get the publishing/acceptance guidelines for the outlet so you can use them as you create, making sure you're hitting all the marks to create a project that meets their standards. Your Program Coach and mentor will help you translate the outlet's guidelines into the scope of your project (e.g. the guest blog you want to write has style and limit requirements, and must have a picture of a certain quality, or be on a certain topic).

In general, the smaller your intended audience, the easier it will be to clear the way for success. Still, it is best to deal with those details before you begin, rather than after you've done all the work. If you want to present a walk-through exhibit at your public library, make sure you speak with the library staff to get content requirements, schedule availability, and any other details, so you plan your project with the right deliverables finished at the right time. Want to initiate a food rescue program at your temple? Find out who coordinates food donations and events, and see what limitations, rules, needs, or wants they have before you begin.



Keep In Mind

A final note: your final project is often just the first step

We hope that your mentorship and the project you created is a step along your journey. Just because you've completed your final project with us doesn't mean that you can't continue to work on it. We've seen students create a final project that targets their school administrators with a proposal, but once it was approved they then needed to create a presentation on their ideas for their peers. Another student wrote a research paper and then decided to write an article that explained their ideas in a more approachable way. And yet another student found themselves talking about their mentorship topic on CNN. You never know where your ideas and research will lead so don't feel that selecting an audience for your project limits you in the future - it's often just the start and provides a way to focus your efforts at this point in time.

