

## **Episode 6 script**

Hey. Thanks for tuning in to the SciComm Toolkit. This is the podcast for scientists and science communicators to get all the tools they need to communicate their science with confidence. No matter whether you are a complete newbie to scicomm, or are looking to start another new side project, this is the place for you. And I am thrilled to welcome you with open arms.

I'm your host Dr Sophie Milbourne, or some of you may know me as Soph talks science. I am a scientist turned full time science communicator specialising in digital forms of scicomm. I write an award winning science blog, share scicomm tips on Instagram and now am creating this little podcast resource full of tools and tips too. I also hope to write a book one day - not sure whether that will be fiction, or non fiction, about science or not yet - still a work in progress. I want to start creating more videos and training courses. I want to learn more about animations and motion graphics. This is my problem you see - I want to do everything.

But talking of tools, that is the theme for today's episode, which you almost definitely already knew from looking at the title of the episode and indeed the name of the podcast. Anyway, I know how tricky it can be to get started in science communication and balancing it around maybe a full time job, or full time study, or even just getting settled in your first science communication job. And when you are starting a scicomm hobby or side hustle, you don't want it to be breaking the bank either if you want to buy equipment, invest in training or travelling to opportunities where expenses aren't covered.

Over the 5 years or so I have been doing science communication, I have juggled more and more things so I have tried to find tools that make creating more productive and more time efficient. So, in this episode I wanted to tell you about 7 of my favourite free tools that I have used and continue to use to help my science communication and I think are definitely worth sharing.

I use a lot of tools. There are things like social media platforms, and Google Drive, but also there are loads of useful tools just for websites, or just for writing, making videos, or platforms to record talks, develop courses and so on. Of course, there will be loads of paid tools out there, some I am lucky enough to be able to invest in now, but I would never have been able to when I started out. Plus I didn't want to spend because I was thinking, well what if this doesn't work out.

I understand there may be things that you need to buy for your type of scicomm, like if you wanted to make videos then you might need to buy a camera, or if you wanted to start a podcast, you might need a microphone. BUT, remember that your phones have pretty decent cameras and mics to get you started. Be thrifty.

The point is you can spend money on tools to help you out but you don't have to to get started and that is what this episode is about. There are lots of ways you can spend money, and spend lots of it, on doing science communication, but I don't believe that you need to, especially when finding your feet. For all of us to collectively create the best and most impactful science communication, it needs to be accessible to everyone, so that we can

have a diverse and representative range of voices doing scicomm too. And that means free and accessible resources to help us hone our skills.

But back to the topic at hand, here are 7 of those tools that I think every science communicator should use, or could use if they need to, that will save you time as well as money.

So the first tool I wanted to introduce you to and it is probably the number 1 thing I would recommend is...

## Canva

I think I use it every day both in my own scicomm but in my full time job too. I seriously just cannot get enough of it. And if you don't use it already, it is going to revolutionise your life. If you haven't heard of it, well I don't really know where you have been because everyone is using it.

Canva is a website, or there is an app version too, that you can use to create all your social media graphics. You can create YouTube thumbnails, podcast art, media kits, CVs, blog post headers. There are over 250,000 different templates for pretty much anything you might need which is fabulous - and yes that is on the free version! You can make channel art or posters or Instagram Reel templates, logos, brochures, presentation slides, certificates, invitations. There is video and audio on there now too.

It is so good that I cannot believe it is free. It's a really really simple and easy to use way of getting some graphic design type support when you are starting off doing some science communication. You can set brand colours, there are hundreds of thousands of customisable assets like frames, graphs, images, stock photos, you can upload your own images, you can also animate things now too. You can invite people into a team and collaborate on documents and up to 5Gb of Cloud storage. Any of the graphics you see on my Instagram account or my blog or website, they have all been made using Canva, even the art for this podcast was made using Canva. It is so so easy to use and it is completely free. Still blows my mind.

There is a Pro version which starts at £10.99 a month. I still use the free version because I can do everything I need to with the free version so can't warrant paying for it. But a big positive of the Pro version is you can magically resize any design, so if you created a cover for your Instagram reel, a few quick clicks later you could have the same design in the right aspect ratio for twitter, Youtube, an event poster and so on. You have access to more templates and stock photos and customisable assets. You can schedule your content to 7 different social media platforms and the storage rockets up to 100Gb.

In my opinion, you really don't need to pay for this when starting off. I highly encourage you to go to [canva.com](https://canva.com) or download the app - probably head to the website first if it is something that is new to you so you can get a better handle of what you can do, and just have a play around. Maybe your first attempt can be the logo for your blog, or a front cover for your science book. I seriously cannot recommend this tool enough.

The second tool is..

Wordpress.com is web publishing software or site that you can use to create a website or blog. I think it is the easiest and most flexible blogging and content management system for beginners. When I started my blog back in 2016, I used Wordpress. Even the websites of companies I have worked for have been built on Wordpress. If you want to start a blog or build yourself a website, I would highly recommend Wordpress, and I will talk about why you should have a website as a scientist and science communicator more in the future and we are going to dive into blogging tips and tools too.

But back to today, getting my blog off the ground was super easy. I made an account, chose a template for layout. Wrote my blog and hit publish. I had stats that I could view. I could also download the app to make any edits. All on the free plan. If you need to learn how to customise layouts or add widgets for Instagram or change your site menu, there are thousands of useful blogs and YouTube videos, but it is really easy to use.

Once I knew that I wanted to take my blog and website further, I was able to upgrade to one of the paid plans. On Wordpress.com, there is a personal plan, premium plan, business and eCommerce plan, which are £3, £7, £20 and £36 per month respectively. And they each have different things on offer like increased storage space, premium themes, google analytics integration, remove ads and so on. I opted for the Premium plan so that I could mainly use Google Analytics but also so I could turn my [sophtalkscience.wordpress.com](https://sophtalkscience.wordpress.com) site into my [sophtalkscience.com](https://sophtalkscience.com) site.

If there is one thing you invest in for your science communication project or career, it would be your domain name. That is my [sophtalkscience.com](https://sophtalkscience.com), or [google.com](https://google.com) or whatever the website address is. Maybe not straight away, but I would say if you can purchase your domain name, I would highly recommend doing that. It's not very expensive, I think it's something like £14 a year I pay for [sophtalkscience.com](https://sophtalkscience.com). Is it £14? I can't remember, but whatever it is, it isn't extortionate, and if there is one thing I would highly recommend a researcher or science communicator having that would be a website. The whys and hows of that we will save for another time.

So there can be costs associated with starting a blog or website, but you can start for free and you can get used to writing, managing a posting schedule, managing content etc. There are other options for hosting a website like SquareSpace or Wix or even Google Sites. I'm not 100% sure about costs and things for all of those. I think Wix at least as a similar set up where you can start for free and upgrade. But Wix for example isn't a content management system like Wordpress - and by content management system I just mean the behind the scenes software to manage the creation and management of digital content. I'm not explaining this very well so I will link to some resources in the show notes, but Wordpress is the most user friendly in my opinion.

Now you may have noticed I keep saying Wordpress.com, and that's because there is also Wordpress.org. I have now moved my website to Wordpress.org. This is a self-hosted site, where I basically pay for a little online town for all my content to live, whereas before with the dot com site, I was restricted to Wordpress limits. I have full control over everything with my website now. It was a bit of a faff to move it across, and it does cost more, but with the

ambitions I have I needed to move it across and didn't start off with the dot org site because a) I didn't know the differences and b) I didn't want to pay for something at the start that I wasn't sure was going to work out. This has probably turned into something far too technical for this episode. We will talk about website things more in the future. But for getting started and a standard website. Wordpress.com is a super useful free tool.

The next tool is...

Later

If you want to save yourself some time with science communication, then scheduling your posts is a game changer. I recently moved to Later so that I could link to multiple social media accounts and the free version allowed me to schedule more posts in advance. I was using Buffer before and I could only schedule I think 10 posts for one platform - which might be okay for your needs, but I wanted more. With the free version of Later I can schedule 30 posts per social profile

With Later, you can schedule photos and videos with just a few clicks. You can also plan your content in a visual way for how it might look on your Instagram grid if that is your bag.

As expected there are paid versions. They start at \$12.50 per month. Where you can schedule up to 60 posts per profile, you could start adding more users if you have a team, and start adding multiple Instagram profiles if you have different ones. You can get some best time to post suggestions, hashtag suggestions, you can schedule Instagram stories too with paid versions. Crucially you can also add alt text to images when scheduling too, tag location and tag other users too and more advanced analytics options too. For full transparency, I have been pretty terrible at scheduling content for the last year or so, but I am trying to get into a routine where I batch create and schedule one afternoon for the week, or schedule a certain blog post to be publicised again on a relevant awareness day months in the future. I want to do this because it will save me time when doing scicomm and won't have to worry about doing it all at the last minute around other commitments.

I have mentioned Buffer as an alternative scheduling tool you could use, or I have used Hootsuite before. A new one I have come across recently is Octopost. I'm not sure of all the details for free vs paid on those but if you are looking for a scheduler check those out to see which best suits your needs. You can also schedule for Facebook and Instagram with Facebook Creator Studio too. But a scheduling tool is a fantastic tool to have in your scicomm toolkit when starting.

The next tool I have for you today is...

Asana

A lot of science communication is being organised and staying on top of projects and deadlines and so on. I now use Asana to manage my whole life. It is a project management tool and you can create boards for different projects. I have one for my work stuff, one for life admin, one for the blog, one for the podcast, one for personal development and so on. Within that I create all the tasks associated with that project and set the deadline. I can then

break that into subtasks and set the deadlines for each of those so I stay on track. Let's take a blog post for example, I will need to do research, then write a draft. I will need to edit and format, I will need to come up with a title. I need images and need to check my SEO, categories and so on. I need to publish and then I need to promote. All of that comes under blog post x. Then I can go to the My tasks tab and that has a list of all the tasks I have to complete and lets me know which ones need to be done today.

You can also set tasks with recurring deadlines if there is something you need to do every month or every 12 weeks or things like that. You can add documents and images to your tasks too.

The paid versions start at £9.49 a month, where you can get some extra features, but for an individual or even a team of up to 15 people, you can use most features for free to stay on top of your scicomm which will save you time and you will be more productive.

There are other project management tools out there so you need to play around and see which ones suit you. One example is Trello which I also love, and I've seen more people recommending Notion too. Although I haven't used that one myself.

The next tool is..

Grammarly

If you haven't used Grammarly before, it is a website you can go to and copy and paste any text you have written - whether that is social media captions, blogs, articles, youtube scripts, brochures, and so on. Copy and paste it into Grammarly and it will give you suggestions on how to improve your grammar and spelling and so on. It's basically a free online writing assistant. There is a browser extension for Chrome or other internet browsers, that you can install, and they are currently beta testing it for Google docs too. So it means it will work when typing emails and things online too, not just your standard word document type things - which I really appreciate. The last thing I want when I might be sending out a pitch email is for there to be spelling mistakes in it. I want to show that I actually can string a sentence together.

Now you might be thinking, don't documents like Microsoft Word do that already. And yes they do, but they can miss some. Grammarly will help to correct any grammatical errors or suggest how you could change your sentences, or if you added an unnecessary word it would recommend that you remove it.

There is again a paid version. It is \$12 per month and that will give you suggestions on how to improve your style, clarity, tone and more advanced corrections. I still use the free version. If you already use Grammarly and use the paid version, please do send me a DM on Instagram. I would love to hear more about it and whether it is worth paying for.

So, it is a really simple tool, but a really useful tool to help you with anything you need to write for your science communication projects

The penultimate tool I wanted to share today is..

## Zencastr

Now I have been using Zencastr to do remote podcast interviews. You can set up basically like a virtual audio room and invite your guest. It then records separate audio files. One at your end, one at your guest's end to make your audio quality crystal clear. When you stop recording, you can then download both files directly to your computer to start transcribing or editing.

You can record just audio, or audio with video. You can also record just the audio but have the video on if you wanted to see your guest and for them to see you. You can record up to 8 hours per month on the free version and have up to two guests in each 'room' so to speak. Although throughout the coronavirus outbreak, Zencastr have said that people on the free plan can have unlimited guests and unlimited recording time, so if you want to make the most of that, get onto Zencastr and schedule your interviews sooner rather than later.

The paid version is \$20 per month where you have the more unlimited time and guest options and a few other extras, but the audio quality I have gotten from it so far with the free version is great. Well, you can tell me if it isn't as you're listening to this podcast.

Now creating a podcast can incur costs, if you go for a host and so on. We will cover that another time. But Zencastr is also a useful tool for remote interviews if you are collecting info for a news article or for a book. You can also do this on Zoom if you want to. Personally, I like having all of it in the same place so use Zencastr for all my different needs. And a bonus useful tool for transcribing audio is Otter.ai. You need to check the transcriptions but that software, also free, is pretty good. But Zencastr - a great free tool for recording remote interviews for whatever your purpose.

The final tool I wanted to share today is...

## Answer the Public . com

One of the most common things that come up in science communication is what do I talk about, or what do I write about. Well, if you are stuck for content ideas then you will love answer the public dot com. Head to the website and type in a phrase that is relevant to your science communication. For this example I have typed in stem cells. It then spits out hundreds of the top questions and phrases around that topic that people are asking about. Here are a few examples for stem cells - will stem cells help arthritis, which stem cells are totipotent, stem cells to regrow teeth, stem cells can be harvested from, stem cells vs normal cells or stem cells and bone marrow. All of which you could create at least one piece of content around. Almost definitely more. In fact, just this stem cell search has given me 375 results, that's enough daily content for over a year.

Let's do another example, with say PhD student. Results like what does a PhD student do, can a PhD student apply for a green card, PhD student vs candidate - what is the difference. Searching for science communication offers - why scicomm matters, what are scicomm skills, science communication on youtube, science communication and employability. It is a goldmine of content ideas. Also note that these are the keywords you want to put into your

blog posts and YouTube video headlines and so on, but more on the details of that very soon.

You can download all these answers and save them into your content ideas planner or document or whatever you have. And if you don't have one of those, set one up - maybe on your newly set up Asana so you can note down inspiration whenever it comes to you. You can only do two searches a day though without paying a premium.

But if you are thinking of activities for your next science festival, looking for blog or podcast episode inspiration or what to cover in your public science talk, then maybe this tool will give you some clues about where to start or what to include.

So that is my 7 free tools that you need when starting out in science communication, plus a few bonus extra suggestions. Just to recap quickly, they were:

Canva - for all your graphic design needs

Wordpress.com - an easy way to start blogging or creating a website

Later - for scheduling social media posts

Asana - for managing your tasks and saving you time

Grammarly - for support with grammar and spelling when writing

Zencast - for recording high quality sound in remote interviews

And AnswerThePublic.com - for endless content ideas to serve as inspiration

We have arrived at the DIY section of the podcast. The part that is designed to give you actions and tasks you can do right away to level up your scicomm confidence and add another tool to your scicomm toolkit.

Today is a little bit different. No worksheets, no exercises and not just one tool. There's 7, which you won't be surprised to hear are the ones I've told you about in this episode. I want you to go away today and take a look at these recommendations, or their alternatives and give them a go. See which ones suit you or you find easiest to use. But I highly recommend that in your toolkit you have Canva first of all, a scheduling tool for social media to drive traffic to your blog or website that you will create. You need a good spell check tool to help your writing grow. You need a management tool to keep track of projects and there are many more content inspiration sources like Answer the Public.com that I can share with you in the future, but this one is a great place to start that.

So make sure to find the right versions of those tools for your toolkit. I will add links to all of them in the show notes, which you can find in this episode description, but also through my website [soph.talks.science.com/scicommtoolkit](http://soph.talks.science.com/scicommtoolkit). Enjoy experimenting.

That is all from me for this week. If you enjoyed this episode, then don't forget to subscribe. We are wrapping up this first season with 4 interviews with some fantastic communicators, so make sure you don't miss out on them and all their wisdom. If you have a few spare minutes, then do leave a review, or send me a DM on Instagram with your feedback. Let me know if and what you are enjoying about the podcast so far. You can find me @soph.talks.science, or you can follow the podcast @scicommtoolkit. And that is all for this

week. Take it easy, and fingers crossed I will see you in the next episode. Au revoir mes amis.