WARWICK
THE UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK

Exploring creative methods to represent and communicate academic research to non-academic stakeholders

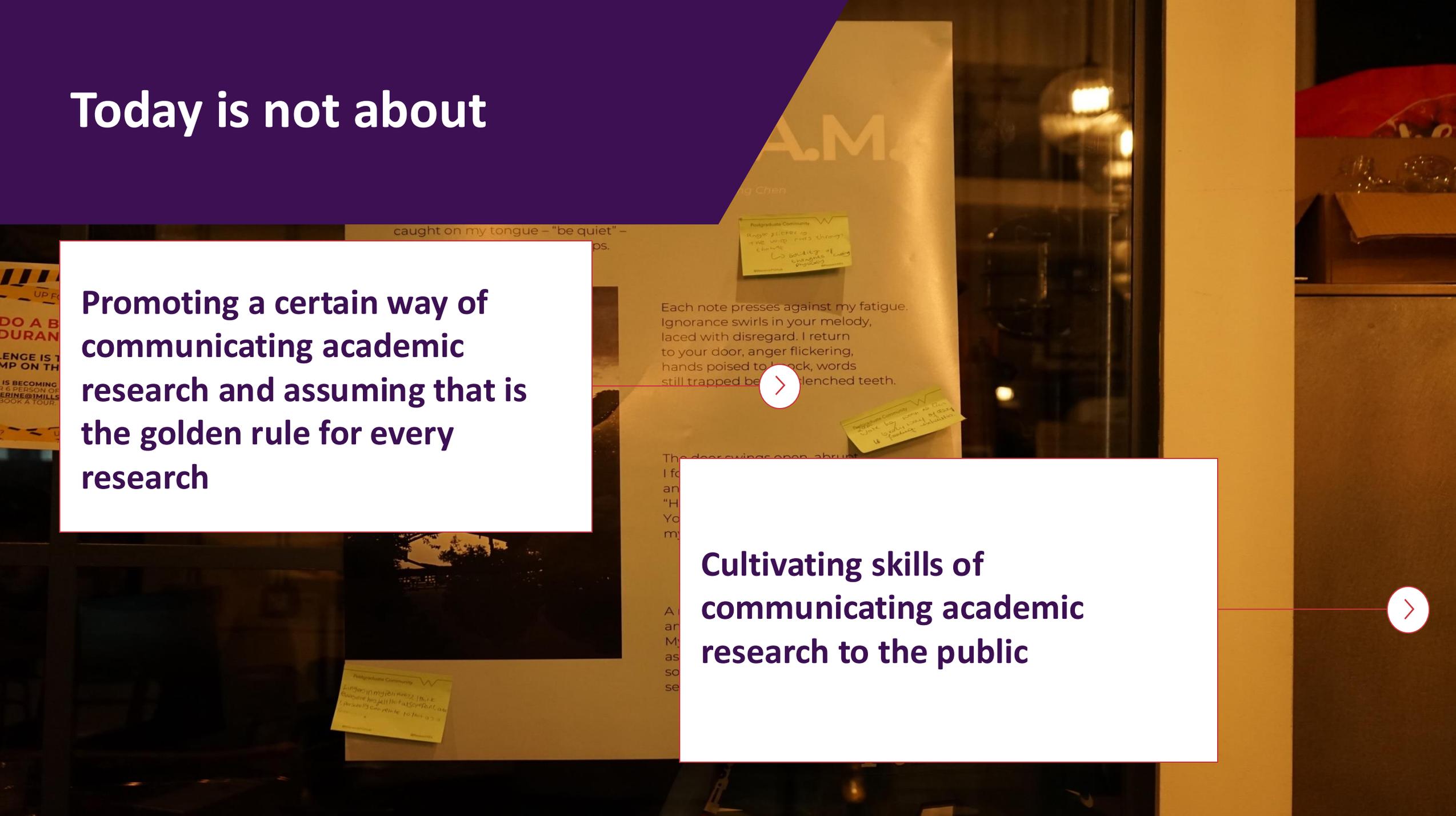Yanyan Li, PhD in Applied Linguistics, Centre for Applied Linguistics

Zhitong Chen, Learning Assistant, Coventry Museums

Today is not about

Promoting a certain way of communicating academic research and assuming that is the golden rule for every research

Cultivating skills of communicating academic research to the public

About today

Sharing experience of designing and delivering a public workshop, funded by the ESRC IAA, that drew on one piece of social sciences research

Sharing experience, journey, doubts, and critical thoughts of how academic research can be communicated to the public

A conversation about 'engagement'

- *How do you see the relationship between research and public engagement?*

- *What do you want to communicate to the public in terms of research? What would be your aim(s) of communicating your research to the public?*

- *What are the normative approaches you use to represent and communicate your work? What creative approaches can you envision to communicate your research to the public instead?*

- *What challenges are you facing in your current involvement in communicating your research to the public? How do you think you will deal with these?*

Why doing public outreach?

- Increasing devaluing of language-related disciplines, e.g., linguistics, modern languages

  ➢ A mistaken perception that language and communication skills are acquired naturally, leading them to be taken for granted. Or our discipline is perceived as doing nothing, and unworthy of financial support.

  ➢ Some linguistics and modern languages departments are being axed.

  ➢ Feel an impulse to show what applied linguists research and the social relevance of our work

  ➢ A desire to understand how the local community perceives the role of applied linguistics in their everyday lives

University of Central Lancashire facing backlash over axing of 'lifeline' language courses

Posted on - 12th November, 2024 - 7:00am | Author - Jamie Lopez | Posted in -

Education, Politics, Preston News, UCLan, University Campus

One former student, who asked to remain anonymous, told *Blog Preston* that proposals to drop TESOL and "most modern foreign language courses" was an "absolute atrocity".

Petition
Help Cardiff University to keep their Modern Languages degree courses

Cardiff University's Executive Board proposes to cut all Modern Languages degrees. Losing Modern Language provision at Cardiff will severely impact student recruitment, student life and degree possibilities, and ultimately will damage the University's reputation and international standing. It will also damage language learning in Wales, and any opportunity for Welsh people to study languages degrees in their capital city.

More details ⌄

My data analysis is daunting to show…

- 'Can you simplify your transcripts? Otherwise, the students would be scared…'

- 'Maybe simplifying your transcripts would make more sense to the audience.'

- My brain felt like a scrambled signal…
  - ➢ What should I do?
  - ➢ What part of my research can be shared?
  - ➢ What are the approaches?

Imagine…

Reading research as if strolling through a gallery,

Not as a silent observer, but an active participant,

A contributor, a creator,

In a space alive with conversation, laughter, and

shared moments over snacks.

Workshop summary

Opening	Introduction and co-construction of rules for enjoyment.
Warm-ups	Icebreakers and Spectrum of Difference activity.
Communicate Findings In-Role	Present research findings through a poetry exhibition; participants explore and discuss poetry exhibits as experts, critics, enthusiasts...
Improvisation	Group improv games to foster creative expression and unlock memories
Free Poetry Writing	Reflective poetry creation and sharing.
Reflections	Visualisation of participant feedback and discussion of key takeaways.

Strengths and challenges

Yes,

- Moments of doubt and embarrassment
- Balancing research depth and breadth with participant engagement
- Obsession with achieving a goal in one step

Yet,

- Create a welcoming environment
- Constantly check the main goal
- Consider participants' experience and preferences
- Allow seeds to flower

5. Please let us know any comments, feedback, suggestions or reflections you'd like to share:

I Loved this event and found it engaging, creative and impactful

May try to promote to public & engage more peoples to the event.
Such as interactive session.

Very engaging + fun.
Delivered by Professional + fun facilitators.

it was amazing and so informative

A public workshop sharing my interactional research insights using poetry and drama pedagogy

Research as we write and reflect

- A poetry collection combining interactional poetry, explanations and reflections

- Poetic format to reflect on the relevance of applied linguistics research and the real-life conversations which are actually structured

A Cascade of Authentic Reflection in Poetry
University of Warwick & University of Manchester

TALK & ECHO

Coordinated by Yanyan Li
Written by Yanyan Li, Zhitong Chen, Stella Shi, Jerry Zheng
Edited by Yichun Jiang
Designed & Photographed by Yanyan Li, Stella Shi

Shared Laughter

I lifted my eyes in confusion,
gazing at you for clarification.
You faltered, lost in hesitation,
silent, without further explanation.

Then a laugh broke the tension,
an error, a smile, a subtle connection.
Another laugh followed, a shared fusion,
two together, easing my self-protection.

Why did you laugh? Was it at my flaw?
Why did he join in? Was it unity they saw?
Should I laugh too, as a smile had grown,
Should I be louder, or just let it be known?

Laugh-at turns into laugh-with,
dissolving threats in bursts of mirth.
Let laughter mend and break the ice,
as strained relations find their worth.

Silence

How do you think?
(1.2)
Uh. I- it's um- [so:,
                    [No worries, take your time.

Can you understand what I meant?
(1.6)
Yeah:::, let me see. [So:,
                        [I guess it is fine.

Shall we move on to the next?
(0.8)
Okay so:::, I guess [so-,
                        [But wait, I still have a point to refine.

Silence postpones acts that face-threaten,
mitigates for several seconds,
maintains relationship and intents;
in stillness, harmony augments.

Why poetry?

Some triggers

- One conversation analyst like me incorporating the real data of doctor-patient conversations into short poems with unconventional layouts

- A conversation with my editor friend in University of Manchester: I asked 'is this poetry?'. He said, yes, nowadays, modern poetry is freer and there are many forms of it.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge:

'Poetry: the best words in the best order.'

Why poetry?

- Suitability of this format (Li, 2025):

➤ **Still textual not totally detached from its original form**

➤ **Structural and streamlined:** Poetry mirrors the dynamic and layered nature of social interactions, making it a compelling medium to explore and communicate these complexities with only necessary words

➤ **Reflective:** Writing poetry encourages deeper reflection, helping researchers revisit and interpret past social encounters and interpersonal relationships

➤ **Reciprocal / interactive:** Poetry fosters engagement by inviting audiences to respond creatively, for instance, through writing their own poems, participants not a passive listener, not one-way knowledge transmission

Why poetry?

➢ **Accessible:** Poetry's brevity and emotive appeal make it an approachable medium for diverse, non-academic audiences (Li, in press)

-Accessible communication creates a 'third space' where researchers and the public can align and interact on equal terms.

-Reducing social distance between presenters and audiences encourages collaboration and broader participation in research.

➢ **Not rigid:** Leave space for the audience to reciprocate and reproduce

➢ **Culturally resonant:** As a familiar and widely appreciated literary form in the local context, poetry resonates with audiences on a cultural level

inclusive, participatory, and connected to the people and cultures we seek to understand
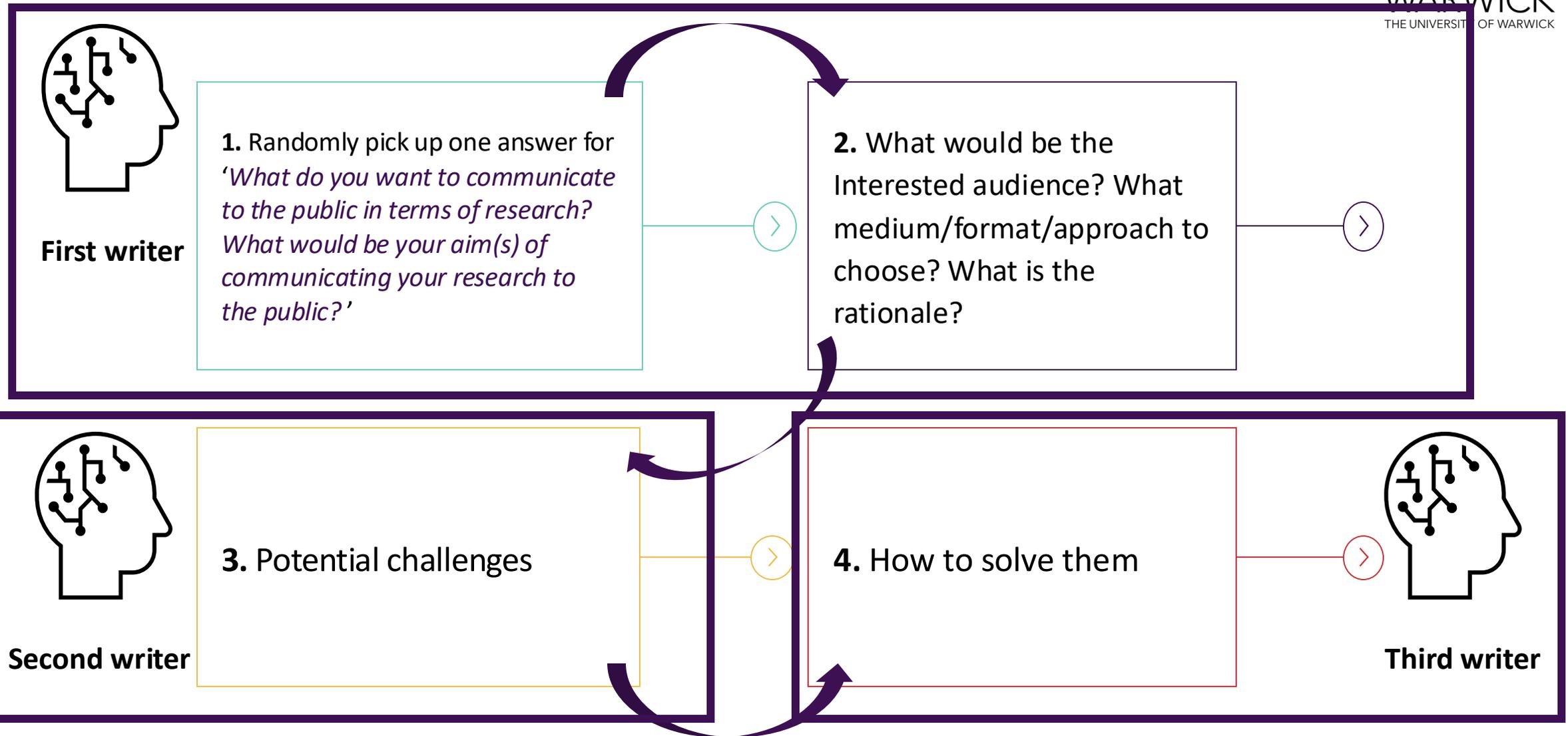
What format/approach to use?

A format/approach that

- Reflects key aspects of research methodology, data analysis, or findings

- Culturally resonates with the public

- Can be practically reproduced by the public

- Preserves some important information of research that needs to be conveyed

What would be your format/approach?

Co-create research communication to engage the public

First writer

1. Randomly pick up one answer for *'What do you want to communicate to the public in terms of research? What would be your aim(s) of communicating your research to the public?'*

2. What would be the Interested audience? What medium/format/approach to choose? What is the rationale?

Second writer

3. Potential challenges

4. How to solve them

Third writer

References

Li, Y. (2025). Conversations and Connections Through Poetry. *AAALGrads Newsletter, 9*(2), 18-21.

Li, Y. (in press). From research to reach: A doctoral researcher's experience in engaging the public through accessible research communication. *Exchanges: The Interdisciplinary Research Journal.*

Any reflections? Questions?

Let's connect!

Email: Yanyan.Li@warwick.ac.uk

X: @YanyanLi9669

LinkedIn: Yanyan Li

Email: chenzhitong_2000@outlook.com

LinkedIn: Zhitong Chen