

Communicating in a pub talk about gene editing – Scenario B

Case Study to Guidance for Communicating on Gene Technology 2025¹

Priya Sharma² is a PhD student in an Australian university-based molecular biology lab with a focus on crop science. Her research is on making a major cereal crop more resilient using gene editing techniques such as CRISPR-Cas9 and site-directed nuclease (SDN). Priya is very excited about the potential for using such precise and efficient technologies for these purposes.

Priya has been invited to do a presentation at a public science-in-the-pub event to address debates about regulation of gene technology.

What should she say about whether gene editing is different than conventional breeding or older GMO-related techniques? Should she present a balanced view or strictly her own scientific opinion?

Hypothetical Responses to the Guiding Questions

1. What is your purpose or goal (i.e., why do you want to communicate) and on what time scale do you hope to achieve that goal?

Priya realises that she needs to clarify the purpose of her pub talk. She decides that her purpose needs to be relatively modest. It is to:

- Share her personal excitement for gene technology science and the potential for gene technology science to address crop production challenges.
- Explain what gene editing is, how it differs from prior breeding technology, and what she sees as the potential benefits of precise genetic edits.
- Explain that as gene editing is a new and rapidly developing technology for genetic modification it is subject to regulatory policy considerations in a way that conventional breeding was not.
- Learn more about the community's concerns and understanding about her research.
- Provide general information about how gene editing is regulated in Australia and refer the audience to where they can find more information.

Priya wants to provide reliable information that will start a conversation for pub patrons to continue amongst themselves. She is clear that she does not seek to persuade anyone to change their mind on the night... *(the reader, on further reflection, may have additional responses)*

¹ Gene Technology Ethics & Community Consultative Committee [Guidance for Communicating on Gene Technology 2025](#)

² The scenario is realistic but the name is fictional.

2. With whom do you wish to engage—that is, who is your audience or target?

Priya can't control who will be at the pub, but she does ask the pub owner who she might expect to be there. The publican describes their patrons as local tradespeople, office workers, university professionals, and people from the nearby organic community garden. There may also be new customers who have seen the talk advertised.

Priya realises that her work may not be viewed favourably by everyone and revisits her goals in Question 1 to ensure that they are still realistic. She anticipates a broad mix of interests and opinions amongst patrons; some might not be all that interested, and others that might hold strong and diverse viewpoints about gene editing or gene technology. Priya is also aware that some may believe what she would consider misinformation...

3. How can you ensure that your communication is transparent and that you are open about assumptions and uncertainties, benefits and risks?

- Priya can briefly introduce her talk by saying a little about her own background, and how she became motivated to be a PhD student in gene editing.
- Priya considers whether she is speaking in a private/personal capacity or as a representative of the university or the research lab. She believes that she is speaking in a private capacity about work at the university, and that she will indicate this at the beginning of the talk by indicating that the views she expresses are her own and not necessarily those of colleagues, or the university or the research community
- Priya wants to emphasise that there are a range of views about gene editing both in the university and among the publics.
- Priya is going to be honest about what she hopes her work on gene editing, and gene editing in general, can achieve for farmers and for society.
- Priya is prepared to acknowledge some of her own unresolved questions about gene editing. She is going to respond honestly to audience members about any questions they have that she also has not been able to fully reconcile — for example, Priya is not comfortable with the use of gene editing for certain non-agricultural purposes.
- Priya considers how she will acknowledge what she does not know and what is beyond her field of expertise...

4. Are you communicating based on your specific expertise, and what evidence will you use to ensure that your claims are accurate and can be externally fact checked?

- Priya is careful to focus on, and to only be specific about, matters that are within her technical expertise. When the limits of her own knowledge are reached, Priya is prepared to explain that gene technology is a broad field with many technical sub-fields, and to be honest that she does not know everything nor have all the information the audience might want.
- Priya fact checks her explanation of the Australian regulatory system and the regulated setting in which she works with her lab colleagues and her team leader. She considers talking with possibly the university IBC Chair and technical support officer.

- Priya will only talk about the aspects of the regulatory system that she is familiar with as a researcher operating in a university setting...

5. How can you move away from simply giving people information — which assumes that the problem is their lack of knowledge and has been shown to rarely work — and instead, have two-way conversations and shared reflection between you and the target audience?

- Priya's pub talk is designed to leave plenty of time for questions.
- Priya could kick off her talk by asking the audience questions or by using live anonymous polling to gain a sense of their perspectives.
- Priya is prepared to adapt the emphasis in her talk to the perspectives that emerge from the audience.
- Priya speaks with humility acknowledging that some audience members may already know about different kinds of gene technology.
- Priya may finish her talk with an invitation to the audience to ask question orally, using live social, or privately afterwards in person.
- Priya may arrange for someone to facilitate the discussion to help ensure that different voices are heard...

6. What forms of media and forums are the best for communicating your message and why?

- Priya believes that a pub talk, a specialised communications genre intended for a generalist audience, will enable her to share her message with a diverse audience, who she can also learn from.
- Priya considers using humour — pub talks might be expected to be more 'entertaining' than other presentation genres — but will be careful not to trivialise important issues.
- Priya may develop a flyer that contains information about gene technology and its regulation, and where to find out more.
- Priya may use slides if the pub allows it. She believes that some aspects of her work — for instance, the scale of Australian agriculture — are easier to understand with images.
- Priya considers adding QR codes to her images or slide presentation and her flyer to provide easy access to more information.
- Priya has some 'props' (wheat stalks and garden flowers) to hand around the audience. She hopes this will help the audience understand the genetic basis of variation in plants and the role humans have played in manipulating it...

7. What values, meanings, attitudes, beliefs, or other underlying considerations should be articulated when crafting your communication plan and the language used within it?

- Priya will acknowledge that there are a range of views about gene editing including the differences between current gene editing and earlier techniques. She will identify which viewpoints she shares and which she does not and/or remains undecided on.

- Priya aims to be honest in everything that she says and to listen and be responsive to what audience members are saying in return. She will acknowledge issues that are unresolved and require deeper discussion by and between experts and the publics.
 - Priya is aware that as an expert in an informal pub talk she needs to balance her training to use technical terms that are precise and accurate with the audience's need for plain language...
- 8. Given the rapid pace of developments in gene technology research, how can your communication strategy be designed to remain relevant and valid for as long as possible?**
- To ensure currency, Priya does plenty of research in the lead up to her pub talk including reviewing websites and social media that are for and against gene editing, and the academic literature, including opinion pieces about the current state of regulation of gene editing and about the social and ethical issues raised by gene editing technology.
 - In her talk, Priya will flag that both gene technology and, in response, regulation, are moving very quickly. She has ideas for how the audience might keep up (e.g. specific websites)...
- 9. What are likely to be the most effective and ethical strategies for communicating about gene technology in the face of mis/disinformation and fake news?**
- Priya believes that by providing factual, science-based information that sparks curiosity she will encourage her audience to ask more questions and to seek reliable responses to those questions that could help counter misinformation.
 - By sharing her perspective and her expertise and engaging in conversation in an informal setting, Priya hopes to build trust in science...

Version Control Table:

Version	Author	Date	Changes
1.0	GTECCC	15/12/2025	Version 1.0 Final