

## Science transparency: Distinguishing healthy debate from harassment

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Endless information requests, complaints to researchers' universities, online harassment, distortion of scientific findings and even threats of violence: these were all recurring experiences shared by researchers from a broad range of disciplines at a [Royal Society-sponsored meeting \[in 2015\]](#) that we organized to explore this topic. Orchestrated and well-funded harassment campaigns against researchers working in climate change and tobacco control are well documented. Some hard-line opponents to other research, such as that on nuclear fallout, vaccination, chronic fatigue syndrome or genetically modified organisms, although less resourced, have employed identical strategies.

Such attacks place scientists in a difficult position. Good researchers do not turn away when confronted by alternative views. However, their openness can be exploited by opponents who are keen to stall inconvenient research. When people object to science because it challenges their beliefs or jeopardizes their interests, they are rarely committed to informed debate.

The progress of research demands transparency. But as scientists work to boost rigour, they risk making science more vulnerable to attacks. Awareness of tactics is paramount. Here, we describe ways to distinguish scrutiny from harassment.

We have identified ten red-flag areas that can help to differentiate healthy debate, problematic research practices and campaigns that masquerade as scientific inquiry (see '[Ten red flags](#)'). None by itself is conclusive, but a preponderance of troubling signs can help to steer the responses of scientists and their institutions to criticism.

**Download Ten Red Flags here:** [Ten Red Flags pdf](#)

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