

Benefits of Working with the News Media

- Reach a large audience
- Increase public understanding & advance your goals
- Support for science requires public understanding

Risks of Working with News Media

- Reporters typically will not let you approve the story in advance
- No guarantee of accuracy of story; they may over-simplify, etc.
- Equity; who gets credit
- Deadlines/short notice.

Tips for When You're Interviewed by a Reporter

- Think before the interview what **your three or four most important points** are, & work those into your answers.
- Think of an interview as a conversation (Paul O'Neill, Mariano Rivera)
- Take the initiative. Don't just answer questions.
- You can answer a question and then make your point by saying something like, "But what we found really interesting is that ..." or "But even more important, we learned that ..."

Tips for When You're Interviewed by a Reporter (II)

- Assume you are on the record (Stanley McChrystal lost his job in 2010 for speaking his mind to a reporter)
- Speak in clear, easily understood language.
- Give short answers.
- Discuss interpretation of data with co-authors in advance
- Do not assume reporters have sophisticated understanding of your field

Alternatives to “No Comment”

- “I wouldn’t describe it that way, but I would say that ...”
- “Let me make this point: ...”
- “That question points out a common misconception. The real issue is ...”
- “It’s important to remember that ...”
- “Unfortunately, our research does not answer that question, but it does tell us that ...”

Tips for TV and Radio Interviews

- Personality and passion are important on TV & radio.
- Know what you want to communicate, anticipate questions, practice answers, and convey key messages.
- Ask about the physical set-up in the studio. If you will hear, but not see the interviewer, make eye contact with the camera lens, and be engaged, lean forward. Talk to the camera as if talking to a friend.
- Try to get an idea of what questions you will be asked, and what the format will be.
- Wear solid colors on TV (not busy patterns or stripes), especially dark colors (such as blue).

Minimizing Risks of Working with News Media

- Provide clear, concise explanations, especially on live TV interviews.
- Convey the idea, but alter the language
- Use analogies
- Be accessible to media and aware of their deadlines: “When is your deadline?”

Examples of Effective Analogies/Quotes

- Telomeres are small pieces of DNA on the ends of chromosomes that act as protective caps – like the plastic tips on the ends of shoelaces.
- “Imagine the cell as a train station jam-packed with proteins. Each protein bumps into other proteins an estimated one million times a second. Most of the time, the proteins act like strangers who brush up against each other and leave it at that.
- But every once in a while, they pass a message back and forth. It's as if you bumped into your sister and she told you, 'Mom said to get off at the next station instead of continuing on.' In this way, the action of the protein is changed.”

Examples of Effective Analogies (II)

- “The identification of the ancient city of Urkesh is analogous to knowing that Rome is in Italy and then finding Rome.”

Writing an Effective News Release

- Explain scientific research in clear, non-technical language for a general audience.
- The headline, 1st few sentences are especially important.
- The most important and interesting findings should be near the beginning (because many people will not read all of it).
- Include a few non-technical quotations that explain the significance of the research.
- Brief e-mail pitch.

Understanding the News Media

- Make research understandable, translate for the public, explain how research affects public
- They're interested in what is new, important to the public, controversial, timely
- Differentiate among media (general assignment reporter or science reporter? Print or broadcast, live or recorded?)

When is Research News?

- New Research Results of general interest
(article in major journal; national conference)
- Day of publication/presentation; next day
- Research that has an impact on the public, and is important, interesting, surprising

Writing a Newspaper Op-Ed

- An op-ed expresses an opinion or argument on a newsworthy issue – not a detached analysis.
- Designed for a large, general audience.
- It should be written in a clear, interesting, engaging way. The writing should not be filled with technical terms or too scholarly.
- About 650-725 words.
- State your argument succinctly and if possible, in an interesting or clever way in the first or second paragraph. Then support your argument. You can also anticipate and refute objections.

Communicating in a Crisis

- 1st answer: What happened? What are we doing to fix it? How will we ensure it doesn't happen again?
- Identify who will speak to media, when & where, & key message points.
- Express concern for anyone who has been harmed.
- Stay calm, confident, in control – “on message.”
- Don't speculate; don't get defensive.
- Consider a written statement rather than an interview

Communicating in a Crisis (P. 2)

- “This is what we can confirm at this time.”
- Hold media briefings on a regular basis (e.g., every 3-4 hours).
- Explain how it happened, what’s being done to fix it, how we will assist those affected, & provide reassurance it won’t happen again.
- Communicate directly with key audiences.