

# Engaging with reporters

How to prepare for media interviews: A step-by-step guide for scientists and scholars

## KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE

- Research the reporter's expertise and previous coverage
- Research the outlet's audience



## CRAFT YOUR MESSAGE

- Summarize your main message, in 3 bullet points
- List any supporting points, including evidence and real-life stories

## PREPARE FOR QUESTIONS

- Brainstorm possible questions
- Practice responses

## INTERVIEW CHECKLIST

- Confirm terms of interview
- Make every moment count
- Get camera ready 
- Be mindful of body language 

# Step 1: Know your audience

**Who could you reach with this interview?**

**Research the outlet. What audiences does it serve? What do those audiences expect from its coverage?**

Hint: Many outlets keep up detailed "About us" pages that contain this information, which will help you tailor your message for greatest impact.

**Review the reporter's coverage. What kind of stories do they cover? Have they covered this topic before?**

Hint: Many reporters, particularly those who are freelancers, keep up a website portfolio that lists recent stories they've written. And at many outlets, clicking on a reporter's byline will take you to their bio and a list of their stories.

**What else is going on in the world that might be driving the reporter's interest in your work?**



Pro tip: If the reporting is asking you to speak to an institutional issue, to film or photograph on your institution's campus, or has another request you don't know how to navigate, your institution's media relations team can help.

# Step 2: Craft your message

Summarize the main thing you want people to know in three bullet points. Remember: If the interview is about your work, be ready to explain what you found, why it matters, and how you did it.

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Hint # 1: Make sure you can explain why your message matters to the audience the interview will reach: Will it impact their health? Is it connected to what's in their newsfeed now? Does it highlight an injustice, an irony, a controversy, or something else meaningful to this community?



Don't forget to make your points easy to understand. Eliminate any jargon. Use simple language and short sentences. And try a metaphor or analogy to explain complex ideas.

**SUPPORTING POINTS (THINK: DATA, OTHER RESEARCH, OR REAL-LIFE EXAMPLES)**



# Step 3: Prepare for questions

**QUESTIONS THE REPORTER COULD ASK**

**HOW I COULD RESPOND  
(THE 2-SENTENCE VERSION)**



Pro tip: Find someone you trust to role play the interview. Pick someone who isn't an expert in your field and will give you honest feedback. Think: someone in your communications office, a family member, a friend.

# Step 4: Checklist for interview day



## Confirm the terms of the interview before you begin.

- Will the interview be live or taped? In general, assume that everything is recorded, even for a print interview.
- How will you use that audio and/or video?
- Who else might be participating in the interview? This is particularly important for TV/radio, where you want to know whether it's a live panel discussion with screened callers, or a 1:1 interview with the host.
- Remember: Unless you are a seasoned pro, it's generally safest to simply answer as if everything you say is "on the record"—that is, that it can be attributed to you. Don't say anything or do anything that you wouldn't want to see published with your name attached



## Make every moment count.

- As long as the interview isn't live on-camera, feel free to start an answer over again, or restate something for clarity.
- Take the opportunity (often given) at the end of the interview to relay any key point you weren't able to address during the interview.
- Offer to assist in their quest for accuracy: "Don't hesitate to call me or email me as you finish up the piece. I'm happy to answer any questions that come up during fact-checking."
- If the reporter or producer hasn't already done so, confirm your name, its pronunciation, and your current title.



### Get camera-ready.

- Choose professional attire that aligns with the interview's setting.
- Pick colors and patterns that work well on camera—ask the outlet or your media relations team to advise.



### Remember: Communication is more than just words

- Maintain eye contact.
- Speak at a comfortable pace.
- Use hand gestures to emphasize your points.