



## Background & Tips for Responding to the Media

### Understanding Journalists

#### Who are reporters?

- **College-educated:** Most reporters earned a bachelor's degree. The younger ones are likely to have a master's degree.
- **Overworked:** Reporters work nights, weekends and holidays. The job typically requires considerable travel and overtime.
- **Underpaid:** A starting reporter can expect to earn about \$20,000 to \$30,000 a year. A "well-paid" reporter earns about \$60,000.
- **Inquisitive:** A good reporter is genuinely interested in many things. This is key and can be used to your advantage.
- **Skeptical:** A keen sense of knowing when you're being lied to is imperative to the job.
- **Jaded:** Most, if not all, reporters got into journalism because they wanted to change the world or at least a small part of it. Perhaps it hasn't quite worked out that way.
- **World-weary:** Many reporters feel they've been everywhere, done everything. Nothing surprises them.
- **Mostly generalists:** Especially in this economy, outlets are losing more experienced (more expensive) reporters and replacing them with younger (cheaper) reporters who may not have the luxury of covering one specific area.



#### What do reporters want?



- **Something new:** Reporters need a "news hook." It's your job to find and identify what's new about what you have to say. It could simply be the way you're saying it.
- **Something interesting:** Again, reporters are generally inquisitive people. You need to find a way to make your subject its most compelling.
- **Something that moves them:** Their job is to make a connection with readers and make even the most complex story compelling. Let your passion show when telling your story.
- **Something relatively easy to digest:** This does not mean "dumb down" or oversimplifying your material. You need to point out the most interesting, newsworthy pieces of your 500-page report.

## Make the most of the Interview

When a reporter calls ... first ask questions.

- **When's your deadline?** This question is imperative. Let them know you will get back in touch before that time.
- **What's the story about?** Don't be afraid to ask for more information. It's possible the reporter will ask YOU to identify the news. This is your chance to set the tone for the interview and, possibly, the article.
- **What do you need?** Get specifics.
- **Who else have you called?** You may not get an answer, but this is a fair question. It can help reveal the "angle" of the story.

Next ... do the following:

- **Hang up to get prepared:** This is key.
- **Jot down some notes:** What do you want to say? What do you NOT want to say?
- **Ask for help:** Call a media expert to be absolutely sure of what you want to say.
- **Take a deep breath:** Remember who reporters are. They may not know very much about the subject. They may have just been handed the assignment. YOU are the expert.
- **Call them back:** Email is also perfectly acceptable if you're more comfortable writing than speaking. Just be sure to meet the deadline.

During the interview...



- **Be positive.** Do not disparage anyone or anything – especially the media.
- **Be comfortable with silence.** Most humans will start babbling when they're uncomfortable. This is when you'll say things you didn't intend to say.
- **If you don't know the answer, say so.** Refer the reporter to someone better suited to answer the question.
- **Don't assume any level of knowledge.** In most cases reporters know less than you think they do.
- **Don't say "no comment."** This instantly raises a reporter's hackles (and interest level). Instead, bring the conversation back to where YOU want it to be.
- **Don't agree to go "off-the-record" or "on background"** unless you know and trust the reporter.
- **Don't be disarmed by friendliness.** This is not a casual chat, it's an interview. Everything you say is fair game.
- **Don't ask to see the story before it runs.** It's unethical for the reporter to do this. Instead, ask to review your quotes. A good reporter will be happy to oblige.

Finally ... avoid scientific jargon.

Below is a list of words that mean one thing to scientists and something else entirely to the public and reporters. To lower the risk of being misunderstood, avoid them. Ask a media expert for alternatives.

Aerosol  
Uncertainty  
Literature  
Enhance  
Risk  
Disruptive  
Ozone  
Bias  
Viral  
Exotic  
Error  
Proposal  
Positive  
Trend  
SST  
Negative  
Species  
THC

Feedback  
Organic  
Regime  
Radiation  
Enrichment  
Sign  
Theory  
Exploitation  
Significant  
Model  
Commitment  
Mean  
Sensitivity  
Fix  
Discipline  
Reservoir  
Transient  
Manipulation



Ecology  
Scheme  
PDF  
Review

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