



Working with the Media: Understanding their needs and their goals in connecting with you, the expert

- All reporters work to a deadline...and today, those deadlines are NOW. It used to be that all reporters faced strict daily deadlines; in today's instant age, a story will be placed on a website and promoted on social media before it goes to air or print.
- Be aware that reporters' schedules are determined by the "breaking" news of the day. Don't be offended if an interview gets canceled or rescheduled—it often means that a more urgent story has arisen.
- Once approached, reporters will appreciate your thoughtfulness if you ask them for their deadline and then do your best to help them meet it. If you cannot provide answers by the deadline, let the reporter know; it's a courtesy that will go a long way.
- When a reporter calls requesting an interview, don't hesitate to ask the subject of the interview and for some sample questions. If you need time to collect your thoughts and the reporter's deadline allows, offer to call back later at a specific time—and follow through.
- During an interview, **avoid academic or technical jargon**. Journalists value the academic expert who can skillfully present complex concepts in straightforward language. So, speak simply, use metaphors that help to convey complex ideas in everyday terms and explain technical terms if you must use them. (We like to say, “pretend you’re telling your neighbor what you do.”)

“...What?! Ten seconds of air time?! But I talked to them for a half hour! And they didn’t cover the most important part!”

- Don't expect every word, fact and figure you offer to be reported. Every news story contains at least one major point, but rarely more than three. This means a reporter will be looking for the **one to three major points** about your research, expressed as simply, directly, and colourfully as possible.
- When interviewed about your research, don't hesitate to convey your excitement about your findings or passion for your work. Television and radio reporters gravitate towards those who can not only explain their findings and the significance of their findings in everyday language, but who can also connect with audiences by conveying their commitment to their work and their enthusiasm for what they do.
- And remember....nobody's perfect. So when you give a less-than-perfect answer to a reporter's question, or give an answer that's factually inaccurate—start over. Be straightforward and tell the reporter you would like to rephrase your response. And if you discover after an interview that one of the facts you gave is incorrect, contact the reporter with the correct information. Reporters want their stories to be accurate.
- Don't over-estimate a reporter's knowledge of your subject. When a reporter bases a question on information you believe is incorrect, do not hesitate to set the record straight. Offer background information when necessary.
- If you do not understand a question, ask for clarification rather than talking around it. If you do not have the answer, say so. Tell the reporter where to find the information, if possible.
- If merited, give positive feedback to reporters after a story appears. Like the rest of us, they usually hear only complaints and rarely get a call or note to say they've done a good job.