FIVE QUICK TIPS FOR SCIENTISTS SPEAKING TO REPORTERS

SciLine

This check sheet provides scientists and researchers with practical tips for speaking to reporters and other media officials.*

1. WRITE DOWN 3 POINTS YOU WANT TO MAKE.
   • Have them in front of you during the interview.
   • State them early in the conversation and repeat them as opportunities arise.
   • Back them up with data and studies: You’re uniquely positioned to inject EVIDENCE into the news.

2. DESCRIBE THE BIG-PICTURE PROBLEM.
   • Even if not asked, step back and briefly describe the overarching issue or challenge in simple terms.
   • Explain why addressing the issue demands a methodical, scientific approach.
   • Reporters often push for answers, but do the above before you delve into potential solutions.

3. IF YOU DISAGREE WITH THE PREMISE OF A QUESTION, SAY SO. IT IS NOT RUDE TO SAY:
   • “Actually, that’s not quite right. Let me explain …”
   • “I don’t think your premise is correct. What I see is …”
   • “That may be one factor, but the bigger issue is …”

4. WHEN YOU DON’T KNOW THE ANSWER, IT’S OK TO SAY SO. SOME OPTIONS:
   • “I’m sorry, that’s outside my area of expertise.”
   • “I don’t have the answer at my fingertips, can I get back to you on that question?”
   • “That isn’t something I focus on, but [COLLEAGUE] might be a good person to talk to.”

5. REMEMBER THESE DOs & DON’Ts:
   • **Do use analogies, visual examples, and anecdotes.** Paint a picture with your words to make your knowledge more accessible, relatable, and memorable to nonexperts.
   • **Don’t use acronyms, abbreviations, and jargon.** They can confuse non-experts, obscure your insights, and increase the odds that your otherwise valuable contribution ends up on the cutting room floor.
   • **Do ask clarifying questions.** It’s fine to ask questions in an interview to be sure you understand what the reporter is looking for or as a way of suggesting a new perspective for the reporter to consider.
• **Don't go 'off the record' during an interview.** If things get difficult, avoid saying "off the record" (different reporters interpret this phrase differently) or "no comment" (which, in itself, is a comment, and not generally taken positively). A good neutral approach is: "I'm not prepared to talk about that right now."

• **Do close every interview by:** Repeating your key points & offering to be available for follow-up questions or fact checking.

*The information in this check sheet is a reproduction of a resource prepared by SciLine.*