
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](#).

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