

You and the media

How to make your relationships with the press satisfying and productive

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There is no monolithic “media” any more

(if ever there was!)



www.publicdomainpictures.net

Newspapers

Fewer dedicated science writers
More generalists



Bob Henson

TV

Shrinking budgets at national news networks
Local broadcast meteorologists increasingly serve as “station scientists”

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Web

Blogs—by science journalists as well as scientists

News aggregators and evaluators

(e.g., Knight Science Journalism Tracker)

Twitter, Facebook

Evolving modes of content sharing & production

Foundation-funded journalism (Pro Publica, Climate Central, InsideClimate News—nonprofits partnering with mainstream outlets)

Multi-platform content (stories repurposed for TV, print, Web text + video)

University and laboratory news releases (increasingly picked up by media with only minor tweaks)

Who might contact you for an interview?

Journalist from a traditional news organization

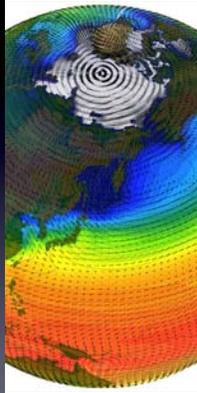
Freelance journalist

Writer from a nonprofit/advocacy group

TV news crew

Documentary production company





Common themes in climate change interviews

- Tell me more about your work.
- What's with this wacky weather we're having?
- How is [*weather disaster du jour*] related to climate change?
- Can you put this new study about [*xxx*] in perspective?
- What should we be doing about climate change?

The interviewee

- Hoping to get across the gist of one's research
- Excited about sharing new science with a wide audience
- Perhaps thinking about how peers might interpret the resulting interview

The interviewer

- Often casting a broad net while hunting for nuggets of gold
- May have preconceived idea of what they're hoping to hear
- Usually under time pressure (sometimes intense)



Some rules of the road

Find out whether you're a good fit
(you may not need to be *the* definitive expert on a given topic)



Ask for a few minutes to collect your thoughts and call the interviewer back

Be sure to ask:

- When is your deadline?
- What's your story about?
- Who else are you talking to?
- When can I call you back?

You're in the driver's seat—assert your rights!

Your key messages

Answer the question you want to be asked
(but don't ignore the question that you actually *are* asked)



Come up with 2-4 succinct points and brief quotes before the interview

... then tweak as needed on the fly

Painting a picture

"Do we want an America behind sea walls?"

Your key messages



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Strong words

"Water vapor in a thin wedge of the atmosphere packs a wallop in a way that we didn't expect."

Your key messages



Answer the question you want to be asked
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Analogies and metaphors

"Glaciers are among our most important reservoirs, and we're pulling the plug on them."

The most successful metaphors are both *apt* and *sticky*



Metro/Wikimedia Commons

SIMPLE — find the core of any idea

UNEXPECTED — grab people's attention by surprising them

CONCRETE — make sure an idea can be grasped and remembered later

CREDIBLE — give an idea believability

EMOTIONAL — help people see the importance of an idea

STORIES — empower people to use an idea through narrative

From Heath and Heath, *Made to Stick*

What's an apt metaphor for climate change as a physical process?



Diagnostica / Wikimedia Commons

A classic one: **Loaded dice**
(Stephen Schneider, et al.)



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L.A. Ochoa, Stanford University News

The steroids analogy

<https://www2.ucar.edu/atmosnews/attribution>



Reasonably apt . . .

- Probabilistic!
- Involves a naturally present agent (steroids) boosted to unnatural levels
- Allows room for counterintuitive results (record lows in a warming climate)

. . . and reasonably sticky

- Simple and concrete
- Emotion-evoking
- Narrative-driven

Wrapping up the interview

Use the last question to emphasize a key point

Q: Is there anything you'd like to add?

A: No, I think we've covered it all.

vs.

A: I'd just like to emphasize again that what's really unique about this research is ...



In summary...

- Craft several talking points
- Work up memorable quotes
- Practice and keep notes near you
- Be concise
- Use the last question to restate key points

