



## Advice for researchers on giving interviews

Giving media interviews can be a daunting experience, but they can be a brilliant opportunity to explain your research to the public in your own words, to highlight an important issue and to raise awareness about your field of study.

### Questions to ask when you receive the interview request:

- What is the outlet?
- Will the interview be live or pre-recorded? Although live interviews may sound daunting they have the advantage of not being 'cut' before the broadcast.
- Will you have to go to a studio or can you do the interview at home? Will the company arrange transport if needed?
- What is their angle on the story? What areas do they want to cover?
- Who else have they spoken with?
- Will anyone be interviewed with you/ will you be head to head with someone who has an opposing view point? If you are, and have time before the interview, try to find out about their views on the subject.
- Can they tell you what the first question/s will be?
- Do they have any context or information they can send you by email?
- Who is the audience? What will their level of understanding be?

You can use conversations/correspondence with the producers and journalists ahead of the interview to make your views clear, and what you are/are not prepared to speak about. This can include stating the points you think are most important to the audience (e.g. 'actually, what I think is most important is...'). You can also highlight any areas you don't know about or are not prepared to speak about, for instance: 'I am not a medical doctor, so I wouldn't be able to answer questions about what patients should do' or 'That area isn't my expertise but what I do know is...'.

Make your departmental communications officers and the University Public Affairs Directorate aware. They can offer advice, help you prepare, and also look out for any coverage afterwards.

### How to prepare before the interview:

- Make sure you have all the contact details for the journalist you are dealing with, including a backup mobile number in case there are technical issues.
- Prepare your messages. Don't assume journalists will have read your publication/s before the interview.



- Make sure you can explain the science in language that a 14-year-old would understand.
- Consider things from your audience's perspective. Think about why your results are relevant to the public and how you can capture their interest. How could this have an impact on their daily lives? This is ultimately what most people will be most concerned about.
- Decide on 3 key messages that you want to put across in the interview. If you are asked a question that does not relate to your 3 points, try to get back to the subjects you want to cover using phrases such as 'what we must remember is...', 'the really important point is...', 'interestingly...'
- Prepare any key facts/figures/statistics and make sure these are up to date and accurate.
- If you are giving the interview at home, ensure you have a quiet place where you won't be disturbed and a good headset, phone line and/or internet connection.
- If it is a TV interview, ensure you have a smart outfit and consider your background. The university has a selection of background images for video conferencing available for download here: <https://communications.admin.ox.ac.uk/branding-toolkit-downloads>

### During the interview:

- Try to keep to no more than three key messages - if you try to add any more to this, the picture tends to get too confusing and lost.
- Avoid speaking in scientific terms and jargon, as these often don't mean anything to most people. Terms in everyday use are OK (e.g. NHS, DNA).
- Similarly, avoid technical scientific units and, if you can, use more common units or an analogy that people can understand (e.g. 'the size of three football fields', 'the width of a human hair').
- Why is your work important? Try and frame the results within the greater context - e.g. heart disease is the leading global killer, causing an estimated 17.9 million deaths each year.
- Have relevant figures, numbers and details ready and to hand: journalists love to quote numbers. But make sure you don't rustle papers during the interview.
- Having said that, whilst well-chosen statistics are powerful tools, make sure they clearly spell out the message you want to get across – don't expect your audience to do mental maths. Examples:
  - Instead of 'The lifetime probability of developing cervical cancer is 0.66%', say 'One in every 150 women will develop cervical cancer during her lifetime.'
  - Instead of 'Between 1990 and 2008, 586,600 hectares of new forest land was planted, leading to a net increase of 488,000 hectares' say 'Forested land area increased nearly fivefold over the course of two decades.'
- Don't feel pressured to rush into an answer - take your time. You can ask for the question to be repeated or state what you think the questioner is asking to check you understand what they are asking.



- Don't speak outside your comfort zone or be pressured into doing so. If the questions start to go off topic, state that it is outside your area of expertise or beyond what the study shows. You can say 'I can't talk about that, but what we do know from this study is that //// ' or 'we are *not* saying that XYZ.' Don't feel you have to answer questions you are uncomfortable about.
- Don't be afraid to communicate areas of uncertainty, but explain why they are uncertain - e.g. there has been very little research in this area; this is a difficult variable to measure.
- Stop when you have answered the question, don't ramble on. It's the interviewer's job to keep the conversation flowing, not yours.
- If faced with an adversarial argument or conspiracy theory, acknowledge it, refute it briefly, and then move the discussion back to your main message.
- Above all, RELAX and try and enjoy the experience!

#### After the interview:

- Write down some notes on what went well, or anything you might do differently next time.
- Look out for any coverage and make your communications officers aware in case they can promote it on their website/social media.

For more information and advice on giving interviews, visit the Science Media Centre website:

<https://www.sciencemediacentre.org/>