

# Tell Your Story!

Media and Communications Guide  
for NIH investigators

With Video Segments

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**METHAMPHETAMINE**  
ABUSE RESEARCH CENTER



**NIDA**  
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ON DRUG ABUSE



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## PREFACE

There is no greater challenge facing the future of biomedical research than to communicate to the public the importance of what we do. In most training programs, participants receive little or no formal training to build these skills for public engagement. On the contrary, most trainees are primed to communicate with a restricted audience of fellow researchers with interest in their particular area of science. One needs only to attend the press conferences at any national scientific meeting to see that the language of our scientific community does not capture the imagination of the assembled members of the press. In some instances, scientists will use the same slides in their presentation to press as they did with scientific colleagues.

As director of the education core of the Methamphetamine Abuse Research Center (a NIDA-funded P50 grant), I wanted to address this deficit in the training of our investigators and trainees. To that end, the core established a collaboration with Oregon Partnership, the premier resource for drug prevention services in Oregon, and its media specialist and local press veteran, Pete Schulberg. This media training manual is the outcome of this effort and represents decades of experience that Mr. Schulberg has in written and broadcast journalism. All of the principles put forth here have been tested on the investigators of our center. Each investigator funded by the MARC has gone through three video-training sessions with Mr. Schulberg to create a concise message, communicate enthusiasm, and establish a camera presence. The results of this training can be viewed on our website: [http://www.ohsu.edu/marc/meet\\_scientists.html](http://www.ohsu.edu/marc/meet_scientists.html).

The current draft of this media manual is a living document and will be updated based on our continuing experience with training our established and emerging investigators. We hope that it will provide interested scientists with a resource for their efforts to broaden their audience.

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VIDEO: WELCOME FROM PETE SCHULBERG  
(see [www.ohsu.edu/marc/TellYourStory/ch1.html](http://www.ohsu.edu/marc/TellYourStory/ch1.html))

## CHAPTER 1

# INTRODUCTION

First the good news: Learning the strategies and practical tools to communicate messages effectively in a media environment or public presentation is painless. They will yield benefits to you personally and to your colleagues.

And there's more good news: It's not that difficult, and you'll be surprised to find it can be satisfying and fun.

Now the bad news: In the heat of the moment – maybe during a media interview – it's easy to forget some of the important things that will help you deliver a stellar performance. That's why we hope this manual is easy for you to read and short enough to serve as a quick review.

My professional experience includes more than 30 years inside the broadcast and print news media as well as working with the media as the Communications Director for Oregon Partnership. Over the years, Oregon Partnership has benefitted greatly – in terms of community support, funding, and outreach – as a result of its positive media image.

We have condensed what I feel are the most important aspects of being a great interview subject and a memorable speaker.

Your work as a scientist is not only important; it is newsworthy. You might know that, and you might not. But increasingly, the media – old and new – come calling to get your story. And you need to be ready for them.

Pete Schulberg  
Pete Schulberg Communications





Preparation is key to staying comfortable in the circus atmosphere of a news conference, where the phalanx of cameras, microphones, and reporters can feel overwhelming if you haven't rehearsed your message. Here, geneticist Shoukhrat Mitalipov of the Oregon National Primate Research Center prepares to discuss a discovery.

## CHAPTER 2

# UNDERSTANDING THE MEDIA: WHAT THEY WANT FROM YOU

- *Tell your story*
- *Be personable*
- *Think new and compelling information*

The media are varied in content and style, especially now that the on-line universe is increasing its share of the media pie. But there is something that all media – old and new – have in common: **THEY WANT INTERESTING CONTENT!** Each media outlet has a certain number of airtime minutes or square inches on the page to fill each day; the more interesting the content, the more viewers and readers they'll attract and the more appealing they'll look to advertisers.

So, the media want compelling information, real people, and good story-telling. You can help them by focusing on what you communicate to them and how you go about doing it. In exchange, IT'S AN OPPORTUNITY TO TELL YOUR STORY.

And remember, being an expert in any field is something the media wants and needs. You're that expert. So take advantage of the opportunity. Be selfish! They're your messages and you have a stake in getting them communicated.

Pretty obvious, right? But somehow, all too often it is ignored or forgotten.

Like scientists, media have a culture all their own. Dealing with them can be easier if you know where they're coming from and what they're wanting from you.

### **What (qualitatively) is the reporter looking for?**

As a scientist, always remember that you have a lot to offer reporters who don't have near the knowledge that you do about your field of expertise. That's why they are calling you!

HOWEVER: Your goal is NOT merely to relay information!

Information is not effective communication. Knowledge is not effective communication. Rather,



your goal in any interview situation is to make a compelling impact on the interviewer and the interviewer's readers or audience. That impact should leave a positive impression about the importance of your work and of what you are trying to achieve.

It is essential to remember that it's not what you say that counts or even how much you know about the subject at hand, but it's how you express yourself, and whether your audience understands and feels compelled by what you are saying.



What the reporter is looking for is not just an expert, but an expert who can convey complex information in an understandable, pithy, and concise way that makes the audience realize the importance of what is being said.

The media and their audiences love "REAL PEOPLE." These are people who don't play the reserved, professorial role, but are personable, humorous, and address the audience at a person-to-person level with a compelling message.

### Kinds of stories

When a reporter picks up the phone to call you for an interview, they're doing so to initiate a story or to make an existing story better or more complete.

Often, the story may relate to a larger or previously publicized story. For example, the outlet might be running a national story on methamphetamine addiction, and the reporter wants to include a sidebar or related story on your local research project.

Other times, you and your work may be the focal point of the story. This happens if you have just released important new data or a big paper with obvious implications for human health. Perhaps your findings change clinical practice, bolster our understanding of a disease, or suggest new treatment options.

The story may have come to the reporter in the form of a press release issued by your institution (see chapter 9), a tip from a source, something the reporter came up with on his or her own, another news story that has already been published or aired, or an assignment from an editor.

### Interviewing the interviewer

How do you know what will help the reporter complete or enhance the story? You can ask. When you finally are on the phone with the reporter, find out as much as you can about the context of the story. You could ask such questions as "What is the thrust of your story?" and even "So, what kind of information are you looking for from me?"

A print reporter may find it sufficient to interview you over the phone. But even they may want to meet you in person or visit your lab and work space. If that's the case, make sure you've blocked out enough time. You never want to be in the situation where you would have to cut off the interview.



## Deadlines

If you think NIH deadlines are relentless, you ain't seen nothing yet. Today, most print and broadcast media operate on a round-the-clock deadline cycle that varies from minutes to hours to (at most) days in length.

More often than not, the reporter who calls you is under a tight deadline. So it's important that once you get that first message on voicemail, you call back ASAP. Waiting even an hour may be too long. The reporter may be calling someone else, and you'll miss a promising opportunity.

So how do you get from a complex research story to a message the public will understand? That's the topic of our next section.





That we all should have this problem: OHSU Cancer Center Director Brian Druker faces the press after announcement of a \$100 million gift from Nike athletic-wear mogul Phil Knight and his wife. New funding is a frequent (and welcome) occasion for media attention at research institutions.

## CHAPTER 3

# THE ART OF BREAKING DOWN MESSAGES

- ▶ *Decide ahead of time what your messages are*
- ▶ *Emphasize them*
- ▶ *Repeat them*
- ▶ *Own the Interview*

### Making the media work for you

What is your immediate reaction when you get a request for a media interview? If you're like most people – professionals or otherwise -- there is an immediate sense of dread or anxiety.

What do they want from me? What's their angle? Will I make a fool out of myself? Will they sensationalize and misquote me?

These are common reactions. And notice they are all defensive responses. The fact of the matter is that most of the time, it's to your advantage that they've contacted you.

It's your chance to tell your story, promote your work, and let the world know what you're up to. In the current media universe, what you say – whether it is print, radio, or TV – will likely be picked up online. And as we all know, the potential audience for any news organization website is huge.

### Defense vs. preparation

Much of the anxiety that comes when you get the interview request comes from the great unknown: wondering what you'll be asked and how you should handle the questions.

What's wrong with this picture? You're on the defensive here, waiting passively to see what gets thrown at you, giving the media control over your destiny (or at least the interview). But it doesn't have to be this way. You can take charge!

In any interview situation with the media or even a public talk, you should always understand that you've been given a special opportunity to relay your message(s).



*Your job is not to merely answer the questions posed to you, but to stress the messages that you feel are important.* In other words, don't be on the defensive in allowing the interviewer to take charge of the interview. Go on the OFFENSIVE with your messages.

### Own the interview!

Every politician worth his or her salt knows this. To them, it really doesn't matter what questions are asked of them (unless of course, there's a scandal at hand). They're going to say what they WANT to say, whether it's an answer to a question or not.



So the first step to a successful interview is to know what your messages are, so you can articulate them readily, clearly, and in a relaxed and compelling manner.

How do you determine your messages for a given interview?

Whatever the subject of the interview – whether it's your own work, or comments on some national news item – you have one or more central points to get across to the audience. Deciding ahead of time what they are will put you in the driver's seat and help you know how to handle any question that comes at you.

What are your messages? Start by thinking about the audience you're addressing.

### Analyzing your audience

Successful communication involves two parties: the sender and the receiver. An effective message achieves a meeting of the minds between these two parties. For this to happen, the sender has to put the message in a language the receiver understands.

This leads to one commandment, common to all effective communication: KNOW THY AUDIENCE.

In the lab, we're surrounded by others who speak scientific jargon. Most of us can get through the workday without talking with anyone who isn't at least close to having a Ph.D. Guess what? The media (and their audiences) usually aren't scientists.

This means that when you get ready for an interview, you can't talk about your work in the same way you'd talk to a colleague, or even a first-year graduate student. Instead, imagine talking with your grandmother...assuming your grandmother isn't a neuroscientist! If your grandmother wouldn't know a term or concept, chances are your media audience won't either.

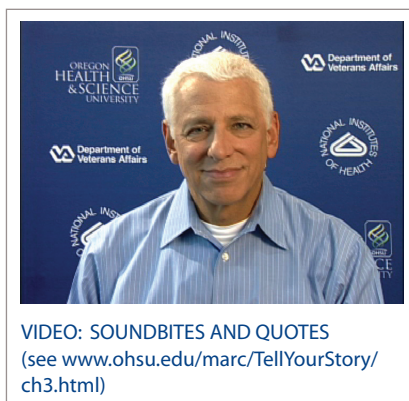
All good writers and speakers think about their audiences. Before the interview, it is crucial that you find out who will be reading, hearing or seeing the story:

- Is your interview going to be included in a daily general-circulation newspaper? A local or national TV program? A website?



- What is the age and educational level of your audience?
- What is the audience's relationship with your research and science in general? Does your research affect them, their families, their medical treatment?
- What kinds of messages are likely to resonate with your audience? Are they most interested in health care, economics, public safety, etc.?

These are questions you should try to answer beforehand so you can formulate your answers accordingly.



### What do you want them to know?

If you're talking to the mass media, chances are you'll be addressing a general public audience as opposed to your scientific peers.

So, though your research might be highly specific and structured, in a media interview you'll want to look for the aspects of your work that relate to the general public. How do the issues you're discussing in the interview affects people, help people understand more about themselves and those around them, better peoples' lives, etc.? What are the basic, bottom-line messages you want the public to hear about your work?

All too often, interviewees tend to forget about "the big picture." What is the larger purpose of your research? It's important to explain what it involves and what you're trying to learn. But why are THOSE aspects important? That's what should drive your answers! Think short sentences, condensing ideas, and making it compelling.

Here are some examples of basic messages:

- We are discovering that some people's genes make them more at risk for drug addiction than others.
- Knowing more about the genes involved in drug addiction will help us treat addicts more effectively.
- We're learning more about how this drug affects the brain, and this will help us design medications to reverse its damage.
- If we can treat recovering addicts more effectively, they'll go back to being functioning members of their communities faster.

*Soundbites are your friends.* Many of us look askance on soundbites, since they are sometimes used to reduce complex thoughts to overly simplistic snippets. A well-thought-out soundbite, however, can instantly help the audience understand what you're saying. And, a short, to-the-point sentence is more likely to get used.

One of the most common complaints we hear from those who have been interviewed for a newspaper article or a TV news story is "Why did they use THAT quote?" My response is it may have been



the most succinct, pithy quote you gave. The media likes succinct and pithy, not to mention concise. Remember: If you think through and plan your messages carefully beforehand, everything you say will be something you'll want quoted.

### **Practice makes perfect... or at least more relaxed**

Once you've developed your messages, spend some time thinking about them before the interview. A longtime sports broadcaster once said that 90% of his success could be attributed to preparation. That's true any time you're giving a lecture or being interviewed by the media. The good news is it needn't be hours of prep – most likely mere minutes.

If it's going to be a phone interview, you can jot your messages down beforehand and have them handy to refer to as the interview proceeds. Go over in your mind (or better yet out loud) what you're going to say and how you're going to say it.

Preparation? More like rehearsing. It's all about focusing on what you're going to say. Focusing on your messaging is important before and during the interview. But if you don't do it beforehand, there's a really good chance you won't express yourself as well when you're answering questions.

### **Questions you can always expect**

No matter what your research consists of, or why exactly a reporter is contacting you, there are some very general questions you are likely to get. Sometimes they are so general that you really don't have good, crisp answers ready to go. Practice some of these basics ahead of time, thinking of big-picture answers, and you can relax and feel prepared. If reporters want more specifics, they'll ask for them!

- What is the purpose of your research?
- In terms of human health and public welfare, why is your research important?
- What is it exactly you hope to find? What have you discovered so far?
- How will your research play a part in the prevention and treatment of x disease?
- Are we making progress in solving this problem?

You should be ready to go with rehearsed answers to all of these questions before any interview. If nothing else, they'll help you think through the rest of your messages!

### **Translating scientific terminology**

If your audience is a general one, stay away from scientific or technical jargon. A reporter's rule of thumb is to use words that an 8th grader would understand. You're not trying to impress anyone here -- you're trying to insure that they understand what you're saying. "Neuron" may be a no-brainer (excuse the pun) to you, but it certainly isn't to most people.

Below is a list of terms that are part of the everyday neuroscience lexicon. Pause for a moment to think about some 8th graders you've met (who aren't your own offspring). Are they going to be familiar with these?



acetylcholine	amygdala	axon	optic nerve
brainstem	CNS	soma	cerebellum
cerebral cortex	cerebrospinal fluid	corpus callosum	dendrite
ventricles	endorphin	GABA	gene expression
glia	hemispheres	hippocampus	hypothalamus
limbic region	lobes	medulla oblongata	nerve fiber
neuron parts	neuron	neurotransmitter	nucleus
olfactory bulb	dopamine	peptides	peripheral nervous system
protein	pathway	serotonin	soma
sulcus	synapse	thalamus	

(See [http://www.morphonix.com/software/education/science/brain/game/brainarium/brainarium\\_glossary.html](http://www.morphonix.com/software/education/science/brain/game/brainarium/brainarium_glossary.html))

Probably not.

So how can you talk about your work if it involves concepts or terms like these? You have several strategies.

- Define or explain the term in easy-to-understand language the first time you use it. “Our research is about a neurotransmitter called dopamine. A ‘neurotransmitter’ is a chemical in the brain that helps one part of the brain talk with another part. We think this neurotransmitter is affected by methamphetamine in a way that changes normal communication patterns in the brain.”
- Use analogies to familiar concepts or processes. “We wanted to create mice that had certain special traits. So we used a process called ‘selective breeding.’ This is like what dog breeders do when they want to get puppies with a specific trait, like a certain coat color.”

Whether you’re a researcher or an economist, if you can explain technical information in every day terms, your audience will not only appreciate the effort, but become more engaged with you and what you have to say. It is always impressive to hear top experts in technical fields communicate easily and allow their audience to understand and be compelled about what they’re saying. Remember, you are trying to make science human and conversational.

## Summary

- As soon as a reporter calls, spend a few minutes deciding the messages you want to convey.
- Think about your audience and tailor your messages appropriately.
- Jot down ideas and practice beforehand. Think about small bites, and how you’ll translate technical issues into everyday terms.
- Relax and get ready to enjoy your interview!





Radio hosts such as NPR's Ira Flatow (here at an OHSU Brain Awareness forum) are masters of gently steering interviews in the direction they want to explore.

## CHAPTER 4

# THE INTERVIEW: FOCUS, CONVERSATION, CLARITY

- ▶ *Be prepared*
- ▶ *Focus on your messages*
- ▶ *Be clear, concise and conversational*

Now that you've thought about your audience and messages, you've laid the groundwork for an effective interview, and you're probably feeling more prepared and relaxed than you would be otherwise. Now it's time to think about dynamics of the interview itself.

### It's not just what you say: it's how you say it

In preparing your messages, you've probably thought a lot about what you're going to say. During the interview, it's time to think more about how you say it. This is the case whether you're on the phone talking one-on-one with a print reporter, or whether you're in front of a TV audience of thousands.

You should always strive for sounding engaged, excited, and enthusiastic.

That's important. Because boring is not good. In fact, if you sound bored, your audience surely will be. Even if your voice or face will not directly appear in the media, your level of enthusiasm communicates itself to the reporter and will shine through in the final product.

All too often, interviewees are either too intense or overly serious, or feel like they've got to sound "professional." This is exactly what you don't want to do. No matter what the topic, you need to sound like you're talking with friends. Speak conversationally and in terms that the public can understand.

You're not trying to impress colleagues. You're trying to communicate with those who don't know as much about certain topics and issues as you do.

The world-class economists and financial experts who have been dominating the airwaves and newsprint in recent months – those who keep returning again and again – have become regulars because they are adept at communicating complicated topics so that those of us who aren't ex-



perts can understand.

Start thinking less about what you have to say, and more about how you're going to say it. In other words, you are NOT talking to the interviewer. You're talking to a particular audience. So it's important to think about who will be hearing or seeing your messages and to communicate them accordingly.

It's really no different than giving a lecture or making a speech. You're trying to engage your audience!

Keep it clear. Keep it concise.



### Steering the interview to your messages

A good interview is an active collaboration between the interviewer and interviewee. A good reporter is going to have done some background research on the topics they're asking you about, and she or he will have prepared questions to ask you.

On the other hand, few journalists or others who may be interviewing you are specialists in your field or know the "lay of the land" the way you do. So, while they're certainly hoping for answers to their questions, they're also counting on you to go beyond that and fill in additional context – to answer the questions they haven't asked.

Make your expertise and your knowledge of your field work for you! Since YOU are the expert, it should be relatively easy for you to steer the interview in the direction you want it to go, and convey the messages you want to get across.

Politicians, when they're interviewed, will often repeat (maybe not word for word, but sometimes yes!) the primary points they want to make, and not wait for the interviewer to ask the question. While this can be annoying during a presidential debate, there's a reason they do it: it works.

In order to emphasize your messages, it is absolutely essential that you repeat them during the interview! It not only increases the chances that those messages will get used in the media story, but it also tells the interviewer that those messages are important and that they'd better be included!

It may seem like you're saying the same things over and over, but that's OK. Repeating means driving home points you want made. In fact, we do a lot of repeating in this manual because we want our points to sink in!

While responding to a reporter's questions, here are some catch phrases you can use to bring the interview back to YOUR messages:

- "But it's really important to understand..."
- "To put our research into a larger context..."
- "The larger issue here is..."



- “But to come back to what I think the important issue is...”
- “Our findings could very well impact how...”
- “It’s important not to forget the big picture here...”

*While you’re proceeding with the interview, the easiest thing is to forget everything you’ve just read here! So remember, stress your messages and go on the offensive.*

### Summary

1. Make your messages compelling and thought-provoking.
2. Be relaxed and be yourself. Being too serious doesn’t work.
3. If you feel the media did a good job, tell them.





A relaxed pose combined with energetic delivery and expressiveness: this is the line you aim to walk during the on-camera interview, practiced here by Methamphetamine Abuse Research Center Director Aaron Janowsky.

## CHAPTER 5

# INTERVIEWING ON-CAMERA: THE MEANING OF RELAXED INTENSITY

- ▶ *Be natural and at-ease*
- ▶ *But make sure what you're saying is compelling*
- ▶ *No "ya knows" and "ahs"*

Even more than phone or radio interviews, it's on-camera interviews for video or TV that strike the most terror into the hearts of those who don't do it everyday. Not only is what you say going to be on record, but your face, your physical mannerisms, your outfit, and maybe even your bad hair-day are going to be recorded for posterity! No wonder most of us would rather avoid these appearances.

However, because on-camera interviews show more of who you are as a person, they increase exponentially your potential to connect and communicate, and to bring research alive for your audience. With a little preparation, you may come to value this unparalleled opportunity to promote the value of your work. Below, we will dissect the elements that make for a compelling TV or video appearance.

## Preparing for the on-camera interview

Unless there's been a chemical spill in your lab and news helicopters are hovering, you're likely to have plenty of advance warning for your on-camera interview. The reporter or producer will call you ahead of time to schedule, and generally, whether the interview will take place at your lab or in the studio, they'll want you there early to show you around, set up equipment, and chat about what's going to happen.

As we discussed earlier, you have a chance in your first conversation with the reporter to get some information about the interview: Why they are doing it? What is the context? What sort of questions do they plan to ask? This gives you a chance to think about and rehearse the messages you want to have ready.

If the producer wants to do the interview on-site and bring a camera team to your lab, you'll need to assess the logistics beforehand. It is a good idea to check with your institution's media/communica-



tions office in case prior approvals are needed. In any case, the office will want to know about your media appearance. If the team is coming to your lab, which areas do you want to show them? Are there certain areas where the equipment conveys something useful about the work going on? If your research involves animals, do you want them shown on camera? If nothing else, you'll want to tidy up areas the camera will access... unless you want the public to see the typical piles of coffee-stained papers!



### Your Look

- *It's up to you. But don't wear white.*

What to wear or not wear may be the least of your worries. But if you're on camera, you want to look pleasing to your audience. As a general guideline, don't dress too conservatively or too casually -- go for the middle ground. Dominant, bright colors look best on most studio sets and add to your sense of energy. And stay away from white -- it often plays havoc with the camera.

Also, make sure that what you wear on top has a lapel or a collar. The studio crew will be clipping a small microphone somewhere near your face to get your voice. If you're wearing a t-shirt or a blouse with no buttons, there will be no good place to attach the microphone, and the mike will stick out like a sore thumb. We don't want viewers to notice the gear. They should notice you!

More and more, video is being shot in high definition. This can be troubling if you're being interviewed. Unless you're wearing a lot of makeup, every blemish and wrinkle will magnify on camera. So, women: don't be afraid to lay on the make-up. Guys: You're on your own. Shave carefully.

### Relaxed intensity: Strategies for communicating on camera

When you read "relaxed intensity," you're probably wondering how it's humanly possible to be relaxed and intense at the same time -- an oxymoron to be sure. But the idea behind this unlikely phrase is to come off as natural and at ease while also communicating that what you're saying is very much worth hearing (that's the intensity).

There is one personality attribute that anyone who appears on TV or radio regularly has in common, and that's energy. Whether it's an interviewee on "Meet the Press," an MTV host, a "Biography" narrator, or the anchor on the evening news, they all sound as though they are thinking, "Listen up, folks, because you need to hear what I am saying."

The trick, of course, is how to accomplish all this. Here are some pointers:

- *Relax.* If you're like most of us, you're a bit or more than a bit nervous before facing a camera or getting up in front of an audience. So take a deep breath, get rid of some of the tension, and relax your body.
- *Keep your eyes on the interviewer, not on the camera.* The only time you would look straight into the camera is if the interviewer is talking to you through an earpiece from some other location.



- **Smile!** Unless you're talking about impending doom, for goodness' sake, SMILE! If you truly want your audience to warm up to you in an instant, smile widely and often. Ever noticed how politicians can talk about very serious subjects, and then pepper their comments with smiles? They do that for a reason: People like people who smile. It's human. It's natural. So, please, do it as much as possible.
- **Watch your pace.** If you're a slow talker, you'll need to speed it up. If you're a fast talker, slow it down. But speaking at a brisk clip is always better than taking forever to get out a sentence.
- **Sit up, but comfortably.** If you're sitting while giving the interview, don't lean back into the chair and don't scrunch forward like you're about to get out of your seat on the bus. But it's OK to lean forward a bit.
- **Gesture away!** If you're the type that talks with your hands and/or uses a lot of body language, do it!
- **Monotone is a no-no.** Be energetic and enthusiastic! This comes through in tonal variations in your voice.

### Avoid the deadening "Uhhh..." or "You know..."

If you say "ah" or "uh" a lot, or, even worse, "ya know," you'll need to get rid of them in a hurry. These are very hard habits to break because they've probably been part of your vocabulary for years. The author of this manual has that problem, and I still, before every interview, write a note to myself that says "DON'T SAY 'AH' AND 'YA KNOW.'"

As with everything, you can practice before the interview speaking while consciously avoiding these. Often, we insert them because it feels strange to sit saying nothing for a moment.

But taking a slight pause is substantially better than saying "ah," or "ya know." They serve no other purpose than turning off your audience and making you appear nervous and uptight. Often, a pause makes you look deliberate and even adds emphasis to what you're about to say.

Remember, no matter what you're saying, it is mandatory that your audience likes you! Do what it takes to come off as pleasant and as a person your audience wants to have as a friend. It does you no good to be stern and overly serious – no matter what the subject.

### Reminders: What You Say Is Important. How You Say It Is Even More Important

- ▶ *Your audience is probably hearing it for the first time*
- ▶ *Make your audience interested*
- ▶ *Sell it*

Sound familiar? You already read about this, right? And there's a good reason why we're going into detail here: IT'S BECAUSE IT'S SO CRUCIAL!

A common trap for any expert in any field is to forget that most of your audience is hearing what you have to say for the first time. And they may be hearing from you for the first time. So sounding matter-of-fact is definitely out.



You may deal with the subject matter every day. It merely goes with your job. But it can't sound that way.

Think of everything you say as exciting, compelling, and interesting. And frankly, if you're being asked about it by the media or anyone else, it probably IS exciting, compelling or interesting.

So sell it! MAKE people want to be interested.





High on the list of an animal researcher's worst nightmares: coming home to find protesters, like this group in Portland, OR, outside your house. Groups opposed to research with animals, stem cells, and other controversial models have turned up the heat on scientists to explain their work.

## CHAPTER 6

# SPECIAL CASES: THE ADVERSARIAL INTERVIEW

- *Think of possible, tough questions*
- *Prepare*
- *Rehearse, rehearse, rehearse*
- *Case study: Animal research*

Most of your interactions with the mass media and the public will be friendly, or at least civil. Still, it's a common nightmare: you're ambushed by "60 Minutes" with Mike Wallace in his heyday, wanting to know where the money went or how your project is harming the public.

Facing an inquisition can definitely drive up your blood pressure, whether the questions come from a reporter during an interview or a 7th-grader during a school outreach visit. But as with interviewing in general, practice and preparation will give you the confidence and ready responses you need to field hostile questions like a pro.

Granted, if you unexpectedly find a camera in your face and a reporter yelling questions at you, you've got to think quickly. But in most cases, you'll have some advance warning that the media, or other listeners, might be on your case.

For neuroscientists, a hot-button topic you should always be prepared to encounter is the use of animals in research. In the last decade, activist groups have challenged the value and ethics of medical research involving vertebrate animals – sometimes violently. While all researchers are subject to attack, those who work with non-human primates tend to draw the heaviest fire.

Animal extremists work against a backdrop of general public approval for animal medical research. But approval that is not as solid as scientists might prefer. Fifty-seven per cent of Americans told Gallup Poll in 2009 that they find medical testing on animals "morally acceptable" -- that's down from 62% on the same poll in 2003.

Public support for animal research is clearly not a slam-dunk. Scientists who talk with the media have the opportunity to educate the public on the value of this work.



The goal here is not to change the mind of a dedicated animal-research opponent - we know that's unrealistic. The goal is to help the average citizen understand both intellectually and emotionally why you think the pros of animal research outweigh the cons.

You may be giving a talk at a public venue and be asked about use of animals in your work. Or, for reasons unrelated to your research, your institution may draw protests from groups such as People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) and you may have reporters calling you for comment. In any case, it's critical that you have an appropriate response ready to go!



VIDEO: THE ADVERSARIAL INTERVIEW  
(see [www.ohsu.edu/marc/TellYourStory/ch6.html](http://www.ohsu.edu/marc/TellYourStory/ch6.html))

### A note on violence

This section assumes you're having an interview or conversation with someone who's interested in genuine dialogue, even if contentious. Some scientists, on the other hand, find themselves in situations where no dialogue is happening -- instead, they're being harassed, shouted down, or physically threatened.

In this case, your own safety and the security of your colleagues and lab are the number-one priority. Your first calls should be to campus security, law enforcement, and your institutional research office.

### Preparing your message

Preparing for an adversarial interview or appearance is like preparing for any interview, but times 10. The same methods apply: analyzing the audience, thinking about the big picture, preparing pithy statements. But you'll want to be extra-sure you've covered the bases.

As with many contentious issues, animal research draws a spectrum of viewpoints. There are people at both extremes: some who think that animal research is absolutely wrong and should never take place, and others who think use of animals should be unlimited and unconditional.

As you can imagine, most people fall in the middle. They may be uneasy with some parts of animal research, but support it when the benefits outweigh the negatives. Your job is to explain how the use of animals in your lab or institution maximizes the pros while minimizing the cons.

Frequently, animal research opponents bring up two basic points: (1) Scientists cause animals to suffer, and (2) animal use is not justified by any necessity -- scientific, moral, or otherwise. You need to have counterarguments prepared for both these assertions.

If your audience views an issue emotionally, you need the sincerity of conviction when you respond to questions. This means there's no one ideal canned answer to questions like those on animal research. You'll need to do some reflecting and come up with the response that's true for you.



## Tips on preparing your messages

### 1. Do your homework to know the common questions

In light of increasing (and increasingly violent) actions in the last decade against biomedical researchers, professional and public-advocacy groups have rallied to promote public education on the use of animal models and to support scientists who use them.

These groups offer excellent resources for preparing your talking points before an interview. A half-hour spent reading through their materials will leave you feeling much better “briefed” for any encounter with the media. You will find information on the history of animal research, lists of frequently-asked questions (and answers), and lists of the achievements of biomedical research using animals. A few suggested groups:

- Understanding Animal Research (<http://www.understandinganimalresearch.org.uk/homepage>) (has a timeline of biomedical research accomplishments using animals)
- Society for Neuroscience ([http://www.sfn.org/index.aspx?pagename=gpa\\_AnimalsinResearch](http://www.sfn.org/index.aspx?pagename=gpa_AnimalsinResearch))
- Foundation for Biomedical Research (<http://www.fbresearch.org>)
- Americans for Medical Progress (<http://www.amprogress.org/content/home>)
- UCLA Pro-Test <http://www.ucla-pro-test.org/index.html>
- The American Physiological Society (<http://www.the-aps.org/pa/animals/index.htm>)
- Speaking of Research (<http://speakingofresearch.com/>)

According to the Society for Neuroscience, commonly asked questions include the following:

- Is animal research really that necessary? Why can't animal research be replaced by modeling and simulation?
- Why are so many animals used in research?
- Is there any oversight of researchers using animals?
- Don't you care about the well-being of animals?
- Does your research cause pain?
- Do the animals come from shelters or from people's homes?

These are questions for which you will want to have planned answers ready to go.

### 2. Point out common ground with your questioner

In general, you're likely to get a more receptive response to your message if you point out areas where your views intersect with the audience's. The audience cares about animals; chances are you do, too. You can connect by pointing this out:

“I agree with you that all creatures deserve humane treatment, and that animals should be used in research only when we can't approach important topics in any other way.”



"I care about animals too, and I would not use them in research unless I felt they were being well treated and there was no other way to find a cure for this serious disease."

### *3. Keep your focus on the "big picture"*

Remember your "big picture" messages we talked about earlier? These are your common-language explanations of what your research is trying to achieve. No matter how technically minute your work is, if you've received funding you've had to show a review board somewhere how it contributes to the public good.

What you need to do here is state that public good in terms so the public "gets" its value not just intellectually, but at gut level. If you're defending use of animals, you use the big picture not just of your own work, but of medical science overall to state your case, using examples of treatments we now take for granted that exist only due to animal work.

"I realize that many people have concerns about using animals in research, and I respect that. But let's talk for a minute about all the treatments we have available that we owe to animal research."

### *4. Don't be afraid to meet emotion with emotion*

One thing that differs about some adversarial questions compared with most interview questions is their emotional content. This is certainly true about most questions that deal with animal research.

While scientists tend toward logical answers and explanations, these may not adequately address the emotional context of questioner. They can make you sound evasive or insensitive. Thus, it's essential that you come up with a response that comfortable for you, but also addresses the questioner's emotions.

For example, if you're asked about the pain or discomfort that mice could feel in an experiment – for example, injections – you could explain that your experiments are designed to minimize the animals' discomfort, or that your work has been approved by your institutional IACUC.

This might be a great intellectual answer, but it might not address the emotional content of the interviewer's question. So you could also respond at a similar level:

"Alcoholism is a horrible disease. It takes promising individuals and destroys their lives. It tears apart families and kills innocent people who happen to be driving their cars at the wrong time. It would be wonderful if we could do our research without mice, but that is the only way we can answer important questions about behavior."

If you have a personal anecdote or story that demonstrates the importance of research, and you are comfortable sharing it, this can be a powerful tool for connecting with the audience.

"A friend's 7-year-old son was diagnosed with leukemia last year. He received a bone-marrow transplant and is still alive today. The surgery he had was developed with research on animals. Without it, he wouldn't have survived. How would you feel if that were your child, or your niece or nephew or grandkid? Would you want that treatment to be available?"



This is a place where the “intensity” part of “relaxed intensity” really comes into play. Don’t hesitate to use some forcefulness to counter an adversarial question. We’re not talking about losing your temper or getting out of control. But the debate on these issues is central not only to your career, but to science and medicine as well. If you’re passionate about it, let it show!

### 5. Pay attention to language

The term “animal model” may be stock-in-trade among research scientists, but it will draw a blank look from the general public. The same goes for terms such as “cell line” and “culture.” “Vertebrate,” “invertebrate,” and “primate” are a little less obscure, but still ill-advised for a lay audience.

Using scientific terminology will at best confuse your listener, and at worst convince them that you are trying to distance yourself from the subject.

Bring the discussion into everyday language. If your audience is thinking in terms of cute fuzzy mice or human-like monkeys, talk about mice and monkeys. It will help you communicate more effectively, and will let your audience know you can reach outside the ivory tower.

If you do want to use the term “animal model” and are willing to explain it, use it as an educational moment and establish your expertise. Explain the rationale for scientists using animals, and the thinking that goes behind decisions on experimental design.

### All-purpose tips for adversarial situations

During the interview, don’t be afraid to say, “Your premise is wrong” or “I disagree with the premise of your question.” Again, think offensively, not defensively. Get your information and expertise out there by being confident and forceful.

If you see the conversation heading in a direction where you anticipate a challenge from the interviewer, and you’re comfortable being “pre-emptive,” you can jump in and grab the bull by the horns. Just make sure you can back up your messages.

But it goes without saying that not being truthful will come back to haunt you. There may be information you’re not at liberty to divulge and you may not want to offer it anyway, but be forthright and truthful. And don’t leave the wrong impression with anything you say.

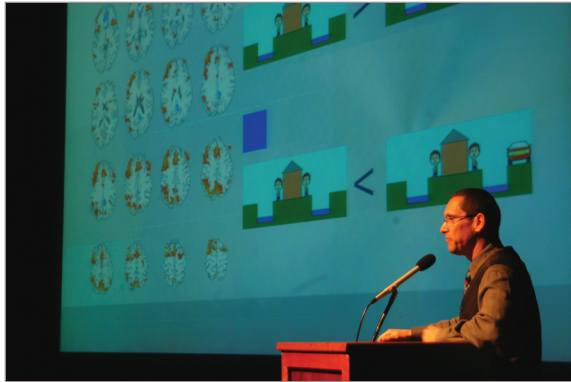
And whatever you do, never ever say “No comment.” There’s always something you CAN say.

### Summary

The preparation that’s essential for an interview or public appearance is extra-paramount if you anticipate an adversarial interaction.

Prepare and rehearse. Prepare and rehearse. Practice your “lines” over and over until you can call them up and deliver them without hesitation. It’s like taking a CPR refresher course: you hope you’ll never need it. But if you do, you’ll be very glad you had it!





Translating research for a general public audience requires more than a careful delivery of information -- it means establishing rapport with listeners. Here, neuroscientist Martin Paulus of UC San Diego captivates the attention of a lay audience at one of OHSU's Brain Awareness Week public lectures.

## CHAPTER 7

# PUBLIC PRESENTATIONS

- ▶ *Don't read; speak!*
- ▶ *Think messages*
- ▶ *Be yourself*

You may already have experience in getting up in front of a classroom or auditorium and giving a speech or lecture. If you have, you're way ahead of the game because, according to surveys, more people fear speaking in front of a crowd than fear dying!

As Charles Osgood in his book, "Osgood on Speaking," suggests, "Relax. Nobody's going to get hurt... All you have to do is get over the mistaken belief that it's difficult and dangerous."

But as Osgood also points out, you've got to radiate confidence. And that means being forceful and doing the same kinds of things we talked about while doing an on-camera interview.

Think primary messages. What do you really want your audience to remember as they leave the room? It may well be just one or two points or subjects. So it's important to concentrate on those and keep coming back to them.

It's not the time to read your notes word for word or to settle into a monotone delivery. The more you can sound spontaneous, the better off you and your audience will be. Again, to quote Osgood, "Listening to somebody read a prepared text is about as exciting as attending a congressional hearing on interstate commerce."

In other words, don't read, speak!

Other musts for public speaking:

- Be yourself and give personal anecdotes. The more "human" you are, the more your audience will trust you and embrace what you have to say.
- Be relaxed -- because if you're not, your audience won't be either.
- Chances are that your subject isn't as serious as you think it may be (although you still want to



communicate its importance). So keep it light when appropriate, and for goodness' sake, smile!

- Don't eat a big meal or have more than one drink before delivering a speech.
- Try to get a video of your presentation, and then watch it! You will see and hear things that you never realized you were doing.
- Smile as much as you can.
- If it's comfortable for you, use humor. But only if it's funny.

If you're speaking in a public forum, pick up a few tidbits about the group you're speaking to, and include them in your remarks – possibly before you get into the meat of your speech. They will like you for it, and thereby listen intently to what you have to say.



VIDEO: PUBLIC PRESENTATIONS  
(see [www.ohsu.edu/marc/TellYourStory/ch7.html](http://www.ohsu.edu/marc/TellYourStory/ch7.html))

### PowerPoint: Blessing or curse?

Now that PowerPoint has been around for 20-some years, it's hard to imagine how presentations happened without it. No screen full of diagrams and bullet points in the background? You mean speakers once gave talks just by talking? Today, of course, PowerPoint is everywhere, and it's been both a blessing and a curse for communication.

Done well, PowerPoint enlivens a presentation and helps the audience grasp key concepts. Done poorly, it can turn a presentation into a snoozefest or a bout of motion sickness. One US general even banned PowerPoint presentations during briefings -- not everything, he said, fits into bullet-points!

If you opt to use PowerPoint (which you no doubt will), think about these pointers:

- Limit your slides. Slides should be an accessory to your talk, not the substance of it. Their job is to enhance the audience's experience, not to serve as your notes during the talk or as a crutch if you haven't practiced enough ahead of time. They should serve only to reinforce key points in your presentation or – better yet – to present information in visually exciting forms.
- Use photo and video. This is where PowerPoint shines. Visual illustrations such as photos, videos and graphs add excitement to your verbal presentation and convey information effectively. Make sure that items showing research data are appropriately labeled and simplified (if necessary) for your audience, and give people plenty of time to digest them.
- Don't read your slides! This is a great way to put the audience to sleep. If all they're going to get is what's on the screen, they could read it themselves and wouldn't need you there. They've come to hear you, not to read slides. Put out some energy and talk to them!





Beware: once you say something online, it's with you forever.

## WHAT TO SAY ONLINE

- ▶ *Be careful, because nothing is private in cyberspace*
- ▶ *Don't be longwinded, and use links*
- ▶ *Be conversational*

Perhaps this chapter should read "What NOT to say online." In the online and social media universe, almost anything goes. And expressing yourself without anybody looking over your shoulder and editing what you have to say has obvious pitfalls.

What you say in cyberspace -- whether it's via video, email, a reply to a blog posting or a FaceBook chat -- is going to be out there for a long, long time. We often think that what we say on line is somehow personal, even private. But it clearly isn't, and people have lost careers -- and even worse -- because of something they said on a website or in an email.

That being said, there are more opportunities than ever to reach the public and specific audiences because of the interactivity and immediacy of the web.



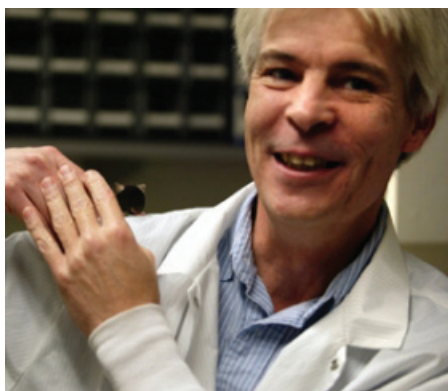
It's been stated that a teenager who has grown up on computers and texting on a cell phone is inherently a better communicator than an over-30-something who came of age before the advent of Blackberries and iPhones. They certainly know how to relay information quickly, easily, and conversationally. And that's good to remember when you're utilizing the web.

Immediacy and interactivity are vital, while length and long text aren't. Think about using links if you need to use longer text, while highlighting your primary messages in a paragraph or two.

In so many instances and formats, language online is almost more conversational than having an in-person conversation! And that is what you want to aim for. Unless it's a professional report or publication that has a rigid format, keep it as human and conversational as you can without letting it sound like a text message between two 14-year olds.

And if possible, include your photo -- a smiling, casual photo.





When your group does something “newsy” – like win funding for a new research program – you can work with your institution’s press office to solicit positive media coverage. Here, researcher Greg Mark poses with a lab mouse for a print story on the newly funded Methamphetamine Abuse Research Center at OHSU.

## CHAPTER 9

# TAKING CHARGE WITH THE MEDIA: PROMOTING YOUR WORK PROACTIVELY

- *Keep in touch*
- *Pitch stories*

Knowing that the media are ALWAYS looking for content, you don’t need to wait for them to come to you.

Keep them informed of what you’re up to. Whether it’s your latest research project or published work, there’s a good chance they’ll be interested enough to consider a story.

A sure-fire way to get noticed by the media and have them interested in you and your subject matter is to highlight anything that is new or happening for the first time. One of the criteria for news media organizations is how immediate or new the subject matter is. That’s why it’s called NEWS. If there is ANYTHING that you’re involved with that qualifies as cutting edge or new and different, the media will love that and want that from you. So, give it to them.

How do you go about “pitching” a story? Depending on the procedures at your department, you’re likely to have two main routes: going through your institution’s press office, and contacting a reporter or producer directly.

### 1. Making the most of your ally: the institutional press office

Most research scientists are blessed with a key communication ally: your university (or institutional) press office. If you work within an academic or institutional setting, you won’t have to go it alone when working with the media. Part of the press office’s job is getting the word out to the public about all the wonderful things the institution is accomplishing – including your research.

Each institution will do things differently, but the media office’s functions vis à vis research typically include:



- Learning about “newsworthy” events on campus -- these may include publication of your new paper or the start-up of your new grant or project
- Working with you to prepare a press release
- Sending the release to appropriate media outlets
- Coordinating interviews with you when reporters respond
- Helping you prepare through interview training and practice for tough questions.

In other words, the press office is your partner in getting your message out to local and national media. Your role in the partnership is to be aware of when you’re doing something “newsworthy” and give the office a heads-up as soon as possible so they can work with you.

### What’s “newsworthy” in research?

As the word “news” suggests, newness or timeliness determines to a large extent whether an item will garner the media’s interest. Two items typically qualify as “newsworthy” in an academic science environment: newly released research results, and the launch of new projects or studies. How newsworthy these are will depend on various factors: how “hot” the topic of research is to the local (or the national) press, how dramatic your results are, and whether the topic relates to a subject area that is emphasized or promoted by your institution. For example, if your campus heavily publicizes its cancer research facilities, cancer news will have a leg up on other topics, all else being equal. If you have any doubt about whether your upcoming paper or newly funded project merits a press release, call your media office and ask!

Timeliness is critical. No matter how exciting your paper is, if it was released last month, it’ll get a yawn from the media (unless you’ve found the secret to eternal youth, which might buy you a few more days). For new research papers, having a press release out on the day of first publication (whether electronic or print), or even before that, puts you in the best position to get phone calls for interviews.

Thus, if you know a newsworthy event is in the works, your press office will appreciate hearing about it at the earliest possible occasion. For example, if you hear from a journal that your manuscript has been accepted and will be published in three months, shoot an e-mail off to your press office now instead of waiting until the day before publication. That will give your in-house writers time to do a bang-up job preparing and sending out your press release.

### *Coordinating with the office*

To help the press officer learn about your project, send them your primary documents: the paper, manuscript, or grant abstract. Most academic media offices handle confidential and unpublished material routinely and can be trusted to keep your items secure; check with them first if you have any concerns.

Usually one person within the office will be assigned your project. Some offices work in a “beat” structure, in which each writer specializes in a certain subject area. This helps, since the writer you get will be familiar with your general field. After doing some background reading, the press officer will probably contact you to discuss more about your story or get quotations for the press release.



You can also discuss the best audience for the release: local, urban, rural, national, or internal.

Your press office most likely maintains a huge database of media outlets and their contact information and will have a good idea of whom to target, though you can certainly suggest particular outlets. The best part: the office does the actual work for you.

## **2. Pitching stories directly to a media contact**

You may have worked with a particular media professional before and suspect she or he would be interested in something new happening in your lab. Often, stories get covered as a result of a one-to-one relationship between you and a reporter, editor or producer. If you've been interviewed previously by a media outlet representative, get the person's contact information and keep in touch!

If you're going to pitch a story this way, you still may want to keep your internal press office informed. Indeed, sometimes you're required to get their authorization -- for example, if you work for a federal organization like a Veterans Administration medical facility. But you can keep a list of the media folks who have contacted you, and any editors or reporters who you think may have interest in your work. And then if you have a story idea, you can let them know.

The best way is through e-mail or perhaps social media, if you're a participant. If you're using e-mail, use the same tactics you would use during an interview: Make your story sound compelling. In the "subject line" of the email, the word "new" always gets their attention.

Of course, you could always pick up the phone and call. But all too often, you're going to get voice-mail or someone who's on deadline and doesn't have time to talk.

If the media consider you an expert in a particular subject or field, they will remember and keep calling you back. And then you'll become a regular, and probably want to hire an agent!





**IN THE HOT SEAT:** There's nothing like actual time in front of a camera to help you relax in that setting. If an interview is on your horizon, check with your institution's press office about setting up some practice sessions. It's painful, but watching yourself on tape pays huge dividends! Here, Pete coaches MARC research associate Daniel Schwartz.

## CONCLUSION

Congratulations! You've made it through the manual! We hope we've done a good job getting OUR messages across and have inspired you to think about your interactions with the media. As you now know, you have a valuable story that the media want to hear -- and in exchange, they'll give you a chance to spread the word on the value of research.

We've talked a lot about the value of repeating your messages to drive them home. Now we're going to put that in action with a list of the take-home points you've picked up in the preceding chapters. Keep these messages in mind, and your interactions with the media will be smoother, more productive, and maybe even fun!

### Summary

- Know your messages. Identify them ahead and state them in clear, pithy language.
- Practice. Rehearse your messages until you can rattle them off in your sleep.
- Go on the offensive! Lead the interviewer to what you want to say.
- Put out energy! Smile, be expressive, punch your words.
- Sell it! This is important stuff -- make sure the listener knows that.
- Be concise. Say your piece, then let it rest.

You've got an important story to share. Make the most of it!

### Feedback

This manual is a work in progress and the MARC welcomes feedback. Send comments to [marcinfo@ohsu.edu](mailto:marcinfo@ohsu.edu).



**VIDEO: SUMMING UP**  
(see [www.ohsu.edu/marc/TellYourStory/conclusion.html](http://www.ohsu.edu/marc/TellYourStory/conclusion.html))





Jim Newman, OHSU Associate Director of Strategic Communications, gets his brain on during Brain Awareness Week.

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