SCIENCE MEDIA | SAVVY

Helping scientists work effectively
with the news media

aus|SMC
australian science media centre

Tips from journalists

What they have to consider when covering your story

- People don't have to read, watch or listen to the media so every story has to be interesting

- There has to be an 'angle' to engage the audience

- No matter how fascinating, every story has a limited 'lifespan' in the media

- They have to be able to present the science simply, for a general audience

- They need to explain why the audience should care about your science

- It may be important to know who funds your research and why

- They may not have the final say in how the story is presented – sub editors get to make those decisions and decide which angle to go for

How you can make their job easier

- Engage with them and behave in a natural, friendly manner
- Explain things clearly and simply
- Explain why your research is important in the bigger picture
- Keep your answers relatively short
- Be available when you say you will be
- Understand their audience and communicate with them, not your peers
- Explain why the audience should care about your science

Some facts about the media world

The importance of speed: Journalists work under completely different time pressures, often having only a couple of hours to do three stories on totally different topics. If you don't answer the phone or if you can't explain it succinctly then they won't use you. They have to write the story whether or not you help them

Lack of control: Not even the President of the US gets to see what's going into the paper before it's printed, chances are you won't either. Even a journalist doesn't have full control, because once they submit a story it's at the mercy of the sub-editors who produce a headline and chop and change the story depending on how much space they have and how the piece fits in with the rest of the news

The realities of the news agenda: Your research may be very important and a journalist may spend a long time talking to you, but if a celebrity gets caught having an affair then your story may well be bumped. The journalist will be just as annoyed as you!