

Tips from scientists who deal with the media regularly

When a journalist comes knocking, ask

- **Why are they calling you?** The very first things you need to know are who is the journalist, what outlet are they working for, what type of story are they putting together, why are they covering the story, why have they got in touch with you, and who have they already spoken to?
- **What is their deadline?** This is crucial. If you have time, even five minutes, then use it to prepare yourself. Decide on your three key points. Talk to your media officer. Research the journalist. Check the news to see what latest developments are prompting the call. But make sure you call them back when you said you'd call them back!

Before the interview, prepare yourself

- **Know your audience**
You are talking to people at home, not your peers. Is it children, members of the public with a special interest, or your granny having tea? Your language and communication style should reflect who you are talking to
- **Know your journalist**
Do a quick web search. Is this going to be a 30-second interview or an hour-long discussion? Have they covered the topic before? Do they report the story in a straight manner, or do they have an agenda?
- **Know the context**
Understand how your scientific knowledge relates to the issue at hand – do some research and find out why it's making news. What else has been said?
- **Know what you want to say**
Throughout your career, make sure you can explain what you do and why people should care in a concise, jargon-free statement. And in an interview, always know the three key points you want to make and that you want the public to hear. They will keep you on track if the questions go off on a weird tangent or it's a contentious issue. Just keep repeating your three points.

General tips

- Go into a media interview relaxed, confident and prepared to engage and be yourself
- Deal with journalists as fellow professionals
- If you're not sure of anything, just ask
- If your science is very complex, work on developing stories and analogies that make it easier for the average person to understand
- If the media make mistakes, let them know, ask for a retraction if the mistake is a serious one, but then move on and be more careful next time
- Accept the sometimes fickle nature of the media – your story may be dealt with lightly or even 'bumped', but the pluses of engaging outweigh the minuses

A final word of advice

Turn to the professionals for help. Your organisation's media officer can be a fabulous resource; help you prepare, tell you about the journalists, write press releases and proactively get your message out. Save their number in your phone or stick it to your computer. And remember you can also always call the Australian Science Media Centre for advice.