

Thirteen Tips for Great Media Interviews
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1. **Prepare** for the interview. Ask if you can return the reporter's call in 5 or 10 minutes and use that time to organize your thoughts and make sure statistics and other important information are at hand. Mentally review the most important facts a reporter will need to know. If you want to suggest other experts for interview, have their contact information handy. Take some deep breaths, sit up straight, smile, and return the call. The only exception to the preparation rule is a media blitz, when you've been talking to reporters all day about the release of a hot new study.
2. Do NOT insult the reporter by asking "what are your qualifications for writing about my highly technical research?" This poisons the atmosphere.
3. DO ask how well informed the reporter's audience is on this particular topic. Subscribers to *Diabetes News* will demand more detailed information about a new oral diabetes medication than the broad, general readership of the *Times-Picayune*. Audience is everything!
4. Visualize explaining your newest publication, or the events you've been asked to comment on, to a specific non-expert – such as your mother, your fifth grade teacher, or a stranger seated next to you on an airplane. Use analogies: "this receptor is like a bouncer at a fancy club, who will only let in hip-looking people." Don't be afraid to borrow imagery from sports, cooking, gardening, automobile or household repair, or popular TV shows – anything consumers are likely to know a little something about.
5. Skilled reporters often try and formulate metaphors or analogies during an interview. If this happens, work with the reporter to make the imagery as clear and accurate as possible. If an analogy is close, but not entirely accurate, work with the reporter to make it right. Otherwise you're to blame when the faulty analogy appears in print.
6. Prepare a concise answer to the "So what?" question. Be ready to explain, in plain English, the significance of your message. Does your finding add to what was previously known? Challenge the conventional wisdom? Add weight to an existing public health recommendation? Suggest that a certain health practice might be ill-advised?
7. Assume that everything you say is "on the record." If you do not want to be quoted on a specific point, ask to go off record on that point only. Be clear about when you're back on record.

8. Don't fake it when you're unsure about a fact or a statistic. If this information is easy to find on a web site or in a textbook, tell the reporter where to look. Or, if you think you can find the answer before the reporter's deadline, offer to do so and then follow through.

9. Part of what makes your work interesting is your own enthusiasm and passion. Cool "scientific" detachment does not sell stories. If you became an epidemiologist because you saw what coal mining did to your relatives, say so! If you've seen a patient's life dramatically improve thanks to a certain surgical procedure or therapy, tell about this (without breaching patient confidentiality). Illustrate abstractions with human interest stories whenever possible.

10. If you are speculating about the meaning of an event or a new finding, say so. Expert opinions provide valuable perspective for lay readers, but they should always be labeled as such. Make it clear that you are not telling individual patients what to do; no one should start or stop treatment without consulting his or her personal physician

11. Be generous with suggestions about where additional information can be found and who other experts are. Biomedical research is about exploring the unknown, and intelligent people disagree about many new research findings. Your credibility soars when you suggest other experts – including ones who are familiar with your research but interpret your findings differently.

12. Do NOT demand to see a draft of the article before it's published. Most newspapers and magazines forbid this. Instead, offer to answer follow-up questions by phone or email. I've had scientists tell me that being nervous keeps them from explaining clearly during interviews. A statement like this encourages reporters to call and check facts.

13. Expect off-the-wall questions. If you're a diabetes expert, the reporter may suddenly remember that stem cell research might help diabetics and ask what you think about this controversial area. If you want to respond, go ahead. But if you don't, say this is an entirely different story and there's not enough time to do it justice. Stay focused on the topic at hand.