

Tips for Communicating with the Media (Press Conferences)



Photo taken at EGU's 2023 General Assembly EGU23

Sharing geoscience information beyond the scientific community helps to not only raise awareness of the Earth, planetary and space sciences, but also to engage the broader public and policymakers on research issues that have (or may have) an impact on people's lives. Press conferences are a means to achieve these goals. They give scientists the opportunity to directly communicate with journalists who, in turn, produce science stories that reach a wider audience. As a press conference speaker, you play an important role in ensuring these stories are engaging, informative and accurate. This guide, which also provides practical details about EGU General Assembly press conferences, is intended to help you in this regard.

Please wait until your press conference to speak to reporters, or make sure any journalists contacting you beforehand would not publish information about your research before your press conference takes place.

If a journalist reports your new scientific findings in advance, they will be considered old by other reporters who will be less likely to attend your press conference. The most successful press conferences, which result in wider press coverage, are those presenting fresh results that all journalists can cover in each of their respective media outlets at the same time.

The general format of a press conference

In most press conferences, including at EGU's General Assembly, speakers give short presentations of around 5-10 minutes, introducing themselves and providing the main points and conclusions of their work. Unless told otherwise, assume your media briefing will be in this format. Following the presentations, the institution's media officer will open the floor to questions from reporters only (press officers and scientists can only query the panel if there is time left after journalists asked their questions). After about 45 minutes from the beginning of the conference, or when the questions stop, the press conference ends.

Be on time, it matters!

It's always good to arrive at the Press Centre/Press Conference area about 10 minutes before the start of your media briefing. If possible, make sure you are available for at least 10 minutes (preferably more) after your press conference in case journalists want to ask extra questions or arrange an interview with you.

Your audience

Based on previous years of EGU General Assemblies, anywhere between 2 and 25 people may attend your media briefing. It is up to each journalist to decide whether they want to go to a particular press conference or not, so we cannot give you a precise number of attendees. In any case, the EGU holds a full-scale press conference even if only one reporter is in the room. Press conferences are also live streamed, meaning that reporters not in Vienna can still listen to you and ask questions remotely.

You're always 'on the record'

Remember that the entire press conference (presentations, questions, interviews) is 'on the record'. Even informal conversations after the press conference should still be considered as part of your press interaction. Don't say anything you wouldn't want to see reported or, worse, quoted and attributed to you!

Technical details to keep in mind

The EGU Press Centre is equipped to show computer presentations in PowerPoint or similar software. There is a Windows laptop available to show your slides, videos or images so please bring your presentation material on a USB drive. Please try to have your presentation in PDF format to avoid compatibility issues when viewing it on the Press Centre laptop. Alternatively, you can bring your own laptop. Please let the EGU media and communications officer know well in advance if you need any equipment not listed here for your presentation.

How to get your message across: the opening presentation

Remember, you have only around 5 minutes to speak – it is very important that you:

- State the conclusions and main points first; explanations and background follow. Remember that this is not an academic talk – rather, imagine you are explaining in only a few minutes why your research is new and relevant to a family member who has never done research but

is interested in science.

- Begin with the main points, even if your talk is in the form of a review.
- Stress at the beginning why your new discovery is particularly important and what are its implications. Explain why you are excited about the work; answer the listener's question "Why should I care?"
- Remember that journalists are interested in knowing what's new and why your work is significant and exciting; literature reviews and descriptions of the methods you used are much less relevant to them.
- Make sure your language is clear: avoid acronyms and technical terms (if you need to use them, explain what they mean), use analogies to clarify difficult concepts.
- Be aware that the graphics and other visuals you are using in your scientific talk may not be suitable for your press conference: simple, colourful and appealing pictures are preferable to complicated graphics.
- Try to have no more than five-seven slides, but make sure they aren't cluttered; another option is having no slides at all.

We strongly recommend you work together with your institution's press office to produce suitable handouts, including a press release, to distribute to journalists on the day of your press conference. Press conferences where an accompanying press release is provided and distributed widely to media contacts tend to have far better news coverage than those where no press release is prepared.

If your university or organisation doesn't have a press office, please send your slides and other presentation materials you might have to the EGU media and communications officer in advance so they can upload them to the General Assembly media website and print copies for attending journalists. If reporters have your presentation, they can listen to what you say rather than having to copy the content of your slides.

Clarify your points: the question period

After the opening statements, reporters can ask questions to clarify points you have made or to gather further information about your work. The advice given by the former American Geophysical Union Public Information Manager, Peter Weiss, in his message to participants at the 2012 AGU Fall Meeting press conferences on [how to handle the question period](#) is particularly relevant:

"Some [reporters] may have PhD's in science; others may have simply covered science for many years. Some reporters may not be science writers at all but have been assigned to cover your press conference as part of their general assignment duties. Those in the first group might ask a highly technical question, but your answer should be intelligible to all. Take a moment to clarify the question if it is really obscure.

Questions are rarely hostile, but reporters will unerringly spot a waffling answer and seek further details. It is perfectly acceptable to decline to answer a question, but you will arouse interest if you don't say why: e.g., "This is out of my area of expertise"; "We are still awaiting those results, and I don't want to speculate" (rather than, "No comment!")."

Further, it is useful for speakers to try to anticipate questions and write down notes for possible answers. Even if you didn't get to use analogies to explain difficult concepts during your presentation, they might come in handy during the question period.

If you feel someone else in the room is better suited to answer a particular question, you are welcome to ask for their assistance. Please identify the person by name and affiliation and explain briefly why they are better suited to clarify the matter to reporters.

After the press conference: interview time

After the questions stop, some journalists may come up to you for further information or seeking a good quote for their stories. They may also ask you for an interview. Please inform the people at the EGU Press Centre Info Desk in the latter case as there are quiet rooms available for one-on-one interviews at the General Assembly venue.

To prepare for the interview, you may find the following resources useful:

- [EGUwebinar: what the media wants to hear from you](#)
- [AAAS Media Interview Tips](#)
- The [AGU Sharing Science website](#) has a number of resources to help scientists share their research with journalists, as well as other audiences

The EGU hopes you enjoy your experience as a press conference speaker! If you have any questions or concerns, please get in touch with EGU Media and Communications Officer at media@egu.eu, before or after the meeting.

This guide was written by EGU Media Relations Manager Gillian D'Souza, based on Herbert Funsten's You and the Media (2004) and Peter Weiss' Speakers Guide to Fall Meeting Press Conferences (2012)

**Last updated on 13/02/2024 by Gillian D'Souza*