



Tips for Communicating with the Media (Responding to Current Events)

A damaging earthquake just happened, or a volcano eruption is affecting air travel, or maybe world leaders are signing an historic agreement on climate change. When such events dominate the news, journalists are likely to reach out to geoscientists for more information about the science behind them. If you have not dealt with reporters before, the tips on this short guide may come in handy when communicating with the media.

- Be conversational and speak at a level a 15 year old would understand: assume your audience knows very little about the science behind the event.
- Speak clearly, avoiding jargon and acronyms: stick to terms you'd find in a newspaper article and, if appropriate, use examples and analogies to help you get your message across.
- You'll most likely need to simplify your science to communicate effectively. Don't worry if you are not communicating the finer details needed to be 100% accurate, instead focus on the overall message.
- If the event caused loss of property or life, choose your words carefully to avoid being insensitive towards the disaster victims.
- Take your time to think about a clear answer and accurately explain your message, and don't be afraid to say "we simply don't know", if that's the case.
- Focus on your key messages and stick to your expertise to avoid confusion or misunderstandings: if led outside your line of expertise during the interview, redirect the journalist back to the main points of your research and avoid speculating.
- Keep your answers succinct and allow the journalist to interrupt you.
- If being interviewed on TV, dress neatly, maintain good eye contact and voice projection, and try to keep still to avoid distracting the viewer from what you are communicating.
- When a reporter gets in touch with you, get back to them as quickly as possible with answers to their questions – or ask the journalist what their deadline is to find out how much time you have to prepare a response. Reporters always work on multiple stories at the same time and events move very fast when reporting about natural disasters.
- Most importantly, don't miss up on the chance to inform the public by communicating with the media. Even if you are not the top scientist in your area, you are an expert from the public's point of view. If you don't do the interview, the journalist might end up contacting someone less qualified or experienced than you.

Resources

- [Top Tips for Media Work: A Guide for Scientists](#) – Science Media Centre
- [Sharing Science: Communicating with the Media](#) – American Geophysical Union
- [Science Communication after Disasters](#) – EGU Seismology Division
- [Media Interview Tips](#) – American Association for the Advancement of Science

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