

Talking to the press.

Why should you do it?

You must

- It's fun
- It might be useful
- It's a moral obligation

Why?

- The public pays for your research, they have a right to know

How to talk to journalists?

BEWARE!

Journalists speak a different language even using the same words.

“Fast”

- 2 to 4 years between the first samples/data and the publication of results in peer review

To be ready for today's
1 o'clock TV news.

or tomorrow's
newspapers

“Long term” means... in
three weeks.

“Truth”

- Tested
- Verifiable
- 90 + % probability
- Until somebody comes up with a better theory
- Check and double check: find two people who say the same thing
- Or be “objective”: some believe in climate change, others don't...

Are journalists dumb?



No, but...

- Talk to a journalist as if addressing a large audience
- As if you were telling your granny
- As if talking to a kid in primary school

Beware!

- Do not underestimate 12 year olds.
- They are bright, inquisitive, they want to know...
- But they have **NO PRIOR KNOWLEDGE**

DO NOT

- Do not talk “shop”
- Never use Latin
- Never use acronyms
- Do not use numbers, formula's, chemistry..

Why not?

It freaks people out.

They feel stupid, shut out, “this is not for me”... and they loose interest.

Surely, it is not as bad as that..?

- Yes, it is.
- Do not try to tell too much. (a hour long TV documentary's comment and interviews can be printed on 2 pages of a newspaper)
- Think ahead of what you want to say and how you will say it.

While giving an interview don't worry about what your peers will think of your answers.

You're talking to a journalist, not to your colleagues or to the professor.

Disappointments

- Nobody might come to your press conference... (on 9/11)
- The interview went well, but the title says something different than you said.
- Your name is spelled incorrectly
- Your story on Antarctica appears with a picture of a polar bear...

Some advice

- Be available. Don't hide.
- Not always the head of the department.
- Have a spokesperson.
- And remember: the journalist wants to go home with a good story too.

Rotten Questions.

- What is the use of it?
- How much does it cost?