

CREATING AND MAINTAINING RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE MEDIA

Engaging with the Media



UNIVERSITY OF
WATERLOO

What Experts Say

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Part of my responsibility as an academic is to share what I know in a way that is simple and straightforward. Engagement with the media is a great way to do this. It's also critically important for female scholars to contribute to these conversations.

ANNA ESSELMET
Professor, Political Science

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The media should be thought of as a tool that can help to mobilize research findings. If you are in the media often, government ministers will come to you, rather than you going to them. To have a sphere of influence, you must be known.

BLAIR FELTMATE
Professor,
Head, Intact Centre on Climate Adaptation

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The University of Waterloo *Engaging with the Media* guide is prepared by Media Relations.

WHY SPEAK WITH THE MEDIA?

What's in it for me?

As a leading thinker and researcher, your work has great potential to affect and interest a number of audiences, from technical specialists, to industry, to the general public. Today's audiences are hungry for information about actions and events that affect them. You have the ability and authority to explain and put into context these latest news items and public-facing developments.

We know it can be difficult to justify talking to the media: you're focused on your research and teaching, your time is a precious commodity, and/or you may not place knowledge mobilization high on your list of priorities. Here are six reasons why you should seriously consider engaging with the media:

- 1. A GOOD MEDIA PROFILE COULD HELP GREAT GRAD STUDENTS AND POST DOCS FIND YOU.** Today's students are much more media savvy than they were 15, 10 or even five years ago. They use every resource available – not just published papers and conference presentations – to decide where and with whom they want to work.
- 2. GRANTING AGENCIES CONSIDER YOUR MEDIA ACTIVITIES WHEN MAKING FUNDING DECISIONS.** Funders have a shrinking purse to work with. Part of their decision-making process often includes reviewing a researcher's media profile and presence.
- 3. MORE DOORS COULD OPEN FOR FORMAL PROFESSIONAL COLLABORATIONS.** Additional media exposure could attract more in-field and cross-field collaborations to you. As more people notice what you do, you may find the breadth and scope of your projects evolve in more fulfilling ways.

4. YOU COULD CREATE, EXPAND AND STRENGTHEN YOUR RESEARCH, FUNDING AND OTHER NETWORKS BECAUSE OF YOUR MEDIA PRESENCE.

Today, networking is synonymous with opportunity. Similar to the previous point about increased collaborations, increased media exposure could put you, your work or your field at top of mind and open doors you hadn't previously considered.

5. YOUR WORK COULD FURTHER INFLUENCE THE PRIVATE SECTOR, POLICY-MAKERS AND NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS.

Curiosity and desire for improvement drive many researchers. As your findings and breakthroughs are broadly disseminated in mainstream and trade media, you have the potential to influence policies and improve standards.

6. MEDIA COVERAGE IS A KEY PART OF RESEARCH TRANSLATION AND KNOWLEDGE MOBILIZATION.

Research translation and knowledge mobilization encompass more than peer-to-peer communications. Broadly distributing your work through multiple channels means more people can learn about your work and potentially act on it.

At the end of the day, you can help the public better understand the world they live in. By looking for media opportunities and accepting interview requests you can help to create a better-informed public who will go on to influence positive change within their own industries, communities and lives.

THE PURPOSE OF THIS GUIDE

The University of Waterloo encourages all members of its academic community to share their expertise with journalists. This is why we created this guide. We hope you'll gain tips, ideas and a better understanding of how to work with the media. We also hope you'll learn about the University's media relations team and services, to help you leverage their expertise before you engage with the media.

SIX REASONS TO PARTICIPATE IN JOURNALIST INTERVIEWS

- > It will be easier for great grad students to find you.
- > Your media activities could help your funding applications.
- > You could open the door to increased professional collaborations.
- > You could create richer professional, academic and personal networks.
- > You stand a better chance to influence the private sector, policy-makers and NGOs.
- > Media coverage is a key part of research translation and knowledge mobilization.

KNOWLEDGE MOBILIZATION AND PLAIN LANGUAGE

Speak so others will understand

Over the past few years Canadian universities and research groups have embraced the idea of bridging the gap between research, policy and practice. At its essence, it's about sharing and engaging with those who stand to benefit or be affected by this information. Knowledge mobilization can happen in a number of different ways, including:

- > Publishing works in academic journals.
- > Presenting findings at peer conferences.
- > Discussing research with impacted groups.
- > Disseminating knowledge the media and other publicly accessible platforms.

The general public wants to understand what you do and what you know

Much of the work done at the University can and will impact people's daily lives locally, nationally and internationally. We also have experts and specialists who can help to explain policy changes and world events. As a result, you need to effectively discuss your work so that others clearly understand why what you do is important, and how it affects their lives, families and communities, as well as help them make sense of the world around them.

Three myths about plain-language communication

MYTH 1. YOUR WORK, FIELD OR ACCOMPLISHMENTS ARE DEVALUED IF YOU POPULARIZE YOUR WORK. The more people understand your work, the more likely they'll appreciate its complexity and impact. For your work to change policy, procedures and regulations, people need to understand it.

MYTH 2. PLAIN LANGUAGE IS IMPRECISE LANGUAGE. The outside world can find jargon and technical terms massive, impenetrable barriers. Plain language can be as precise (or as vague) as technical or specialist language, but has the advantage of inviting more people into the conversation.

MYTH 3. SIMPLIFIED LANGUAGE TALKS DOWN TO THE AUDIENCE AND THEREFORE ALIENATES THEM. Plain language is an inclusive, respectful, communications style that offers accessible information to audiences, regardless of their own expertise or education. The feeling of being talked down to is often the result of the tone used.

Ask your communications teams for help

We know it can be difficult switching gears from highly complex and technical specialist language to using words and terms that have a more general appeal. Your Faculty communicators and the University's media relations team are available to help you create accessible messages that the media and the public will appreciate.

Plain language is an inclusive, respectful communications style that helps non-technical audiences understand and appreciate the work you do, and advocate its use in their professional or personal lives.

SEVEN TIPS TO HELP COMMUNICATE IN PLAIN LANGUAGE

- > When explaining a concept, imagine you are explaining it to a first-year undergraduate student.
- > Replace jargon and technical terms with easier-to-follow terms and phrases.
- > Never use a complex word when a simple one will do.
- > Write in short sentences (between 18 and 22 words).
- > Use the active voice.
- > Use accessible analogies and examples to illustrate ideas.
- > Find ways to humanize numbers, to give the audience a better sense of scale or impact.

WORKING WITH THE MEDIA

*Journalists, researchers and academics:
you're really not all that different*

Believe it or not, journalists and academics do similar work: to better understand issues and situations, uncover the truth, and communicate findings with limited resources. Once you understand your similarities and differences, you're on your way to developing effective and mutually beneficial relationships with reporters.

A peek into the journalist's world

Journalism has always been highly competitive, but the past decade ushered in a number of important changes to the media industry.

MEDIA CONVERGENCE

A handful of large media companies now own formerly independent newspapers, magazines and broadcasters.

SHRINKING BUDGETS AND MULTITASKING

Previously, one journalist wrote the story, another broadcast it, another wrote the online version, and a photojournalist took pictures and video. Today, one reporter tells the same story across multiple platforms.

SHORTER DEADLINES

Thanks to social media, the public often knows about news before a journalist. As a result, there's increased pressure to file quickly and first in the 24/7 news cycle.

Journalistic practice and ethics

Just as academics and researchers strive for academic and research freedom, journalists want the same in their industry. Most pride themselves for their role in democracy and value their independence.

- › The Atkinson Principles, named after a former publisher of the Toronto Star, continue to drive many reporters and editors in Canada and beyond.
- › Many reporters will not share their questions before the interview.
- › Most journalists will not, or are not allowed to, submit their story for your approval before filing.

Why the media want to talk to you

Reporters inform audiences about important issues, and need experts like you to help explain the ins and outs while being:

- › Passionate about the topic.
- › Effective and articulate in explaining topics to the average person.
- › Engaging when explaining how your research and findings relate to the community.

TO DEVELOP A GOOD MEDIA PRESENCE, YOU SHOULD UNDERSTAND WHAT IMPACTS REPORTERS

- › Media convergence
- › Shrinking budgets and multitasking
- › Tight deadlines

THE ATKINSON PRINCIPLES ON THE ROLE OF A LARGE CITY NEWSPAPER AND THE EDITORIAL PRINCIPLES IT SHOULD ESPOUSE

1. A strong, united and independent Canada.
2. Social justice.
3. Individual and civil liberties.
4. Community and civic engagement.
5. The rights of working people.
6. The necessary role of government.

HANDLING MEDIA CALLS

What to do when a journalist contacts you

It's important to understand that the media may contact any member of the University for comment or information. While faculty are free to speak to reporters at any time, staff should forward any and all media queries to the media relations team.

Advice for faculty

You can contact our media relations specialists to coach you in working with the media. If you choose to handle the call yourself, please keep the following in mind:

RETURN CALLS QUICKLY

Journalists can work on deadlines as short as 20 minutes, so they need a quick response, even if you decline their request.

GET AS MANY DETAILS ABOUT THE STORY AS YOU CAN

Ask for details such as the interview's focus, when the story will appear, and interview logistics, such as length and location.

ARE YOU THE RIGHT EXPERT FOR THIS STORY?

If you're not the right person to comment, let the journalists know and refer them to the media relations team to find an appropriate expert.

PREPARE FOR YOUR INTERVIEW

Don't feel compelled to provide on-the-spot remarks. It's usually best to arrange for a time to connect with the journalist, to give you time to compose your thoughts.

NOTHING IS OFF THE RECORD AND ASSUME YOU'RE BEING RECORDED

It's best to assume that everything you say to reporters could appear as part of their story, or a future one. They often record calls for note-taking purposes, or in rare exceptions to broadcast a telephone conversation.

KEEP COMPREHENSIVE CONTACT DETAILS FOR THE JOURNALIST

Make sure that you record contact details for the journalist for sharing these details with the media relations team.

Advice for staff

Staff should refer journalists to the University's media relations team for assistance. If the reporter is resistant to this suggestion, then please do the following before contacting the media relations office:

CONTACT BY PHONE OR IN PERSON

- › Try to obtain as much information about the journalist as possible, including:
 - the journalist's name
 - the media outlet represented (newspaper, magazine, radio or television station, etc.)
 - email address
 - phone number
 - nature of the enquiry
 - deadline
- › Do not promise to give an interview, or confirm whether you are the appropriate spokesperson.
- › Do not confirm or deny any information on the initial call.
- › Tell the journalist a member of the media relations team will get back to them.
- › Inform the media relations team about the media request as soon as possible.

CONTACT BY EMAIL/LETTER/SOCIAL MEDIA

- › Do not reply.
- › Forward (do not reply and cc) the email/letter/social media post to the media relations team to seek advice.
- › Important: Never forward emails from the media relations team to a journalist.

STAFF

What to tell the media relations team about the call:

- › The journalist's name
- › The media outlet
- › Contact information
- › Nature of the enquiry

FACULTY

Be sure to let the media relations team know if you'll be interviewed, so they can monitor news coverage.

NEGOTIATING AN INTERVIEW

Keep the following six questions in mind when finding out what the journalist is looking for:

- › What's the purpose of the interview, and what's the story's focus?
- › Who's the audience (the general public, specialists, etc.)?
- › What's the deadline?
- › When will the story be published/broadcast?
- › How long will the interview be?
- › (if broadcast) Will the interview be live or taped, and where will it take place?

BEFORE, DURING AND AFTER YOUR INTERVIEW

Tips and tricks to working with journalists

A good interview is a conversation

Remember your interview with the reporter is really a conversation with the audience. You're there to explain the topic or issue in a way that resonates with those who read the article or tune into the broadcast.

Do a little homework beforehand

You know your topic inside out. The key is to distil that knowledge into messages the journalist can use and the audience will understand.

- › Use clear, concise and accessible wording that's still natural to you.
- › Work with the media relations team to figure out the most likely questions you'll be asked, and develop your responses to those.
- › Practice delivering your messages: you should sound comfortable but not over-rehearsed.
- › Be sure to have an answer to, "Is there anything else you'd like to add?" This is your opportunity to say again what you really want the audience to remember.

Practice a little reputation management

Although your conversation is about explaining a topic or an event, it's also about managing reputations – yours, your field's, and the University's.

- › Before your interview begins, ask to be identified as being from the University of Waterloo.
- › Everything you say is on the record. Anything you say can appear in the article you're being interviewed for, or in another that appears in the future.
- › Don't fill a reporter's extended pauses. Focus on what you want to say in short, understandable chunks, and then stop talking.
- › Offer to share information, such as charts and tables, or links to articles with the reporters to help them with specific points of information.

After the interview

The interview isn't done when the reporter puts away the voice recorder, or the camera lights click off. Provide any follow-up information you promised during the interview. Let the media relations team know how the interview went, especially if you feel you had difficulty, or if there is additional information the reporter needs. Review the article once published and contact the media relations team if there are any issues.

JOURNALISTIC ETHICS AND PRACTICE ARE BASED ON DEMOCRATIC VALUES AND INDEPENDENCE

- › Many reporters will not share their questions before the interview.
- › Most will not submit their article to you for approval before it's filed with their editor.
- › If the topic is particularly complex, you can offer to review certain sections of the article, to help the reporter with the finer points. Just remember that reporters work on very tight timelines, so you will be expected to turn around any comments within a short window of time.

MANAGING YOUR INTERVIEW

Ideas to help answer tricky question

You may have found out all you could about the interview and prepared your key messages, but sometimes you could be faced with questions or situations you weren't expecting.

Know how to answer the unexpected

Even though your interview may be about your latest breakthrough, reporters may sometimes ask you questions that seem to come from left field or want you to comment on an overshadowing issue at the University. Here are some sample responses:

- › “You know, that’s not really my area. Let me see what I can do to connect you with someone who’s better able to talk to that...”
- › “That’s something I’m sure our media relations team can help you with – I’ll get them to contact you about it.”

Don’t speculate to accumulate

It’s tempting to speculate about what could happen, or why something is the way it is. It can also be dangerous and lead to sensational headlines or stories. Respond by bringing the conversation back to fact and truth:

- › “Without getting into guesswork, let me tell you what I know/what the research shows...”
- › “They really are the best ones to talk about the reasons behind their decision. I think your best bet is to ask them directly.”

Bridging statements and other hip-pocket responses will help you respond to tricky or unexpected questions.

Remember what you can and cannot talk about

Reporters are always looking for the next scoop and may ask you to divulge confidential or sensitive information. Responding with “no comment” makes you look and sound as if you’re blocking the reporter or hiding information. Respond with what you can discuss:

> “Here’s what I can say...”

Don’t echo a negative wording in your response

Many of us are taught to repeat part of the question in our responses. Doing this with a phrased question can colour your response. (“I am not a crook.”) Keep responses positive, where possible:

> If reality is positive, “Really, the picture is exactly the opposite...”

> If reality is negative, focus on solutions.

Keep your cool

As an academic or researcher, it’s unlikely you’ll frequently be the target of aggressive reporting or an accountability interview. That said, you might be asked tricky questions that make you uncomfortable. Remember to remain calm and respectful. Storming off in anger or giving the reporter a piece of your mind will pretty much guarantee that’s what will be reported and remembered by the audience, not your calm and reasoned responses.

Bridging statements

Regardless of how prepared you are, you could be faced with some tricky questions. Bridging statements help to bring back the conversation to comfortable territory, while acknowledging the question asked. Bridging uses simple, concise phrases to move from an answer to a message, and are best when phrased in your own, natural language. Samples include:

> “However, the real issue here is...”

> “And what’s most important to remember is...”

> “With this in mind, if we look at the bigger picture...”

> “If we take a closer look, we would see...”

> “And the one thing that is important to remember is...”

> “What I’ve said comes down to this...”

The University’s media relations team has a lot of experience conducting interviews and preparing experts for them. Please feel free to contact a member of the team to discuss possible lines of questioning and logistics to help you feel the most at ease while providing journalists with a wealth of useful – and usable – quotes or clips for their stories.

BROADCAST INTERVIEWS

Is this thing on?

Unlike speaking with a print reporter, television and radio interviews are like performances. Broadcast journalists can rarely explore an issue in great depth due to time constraints, so it's very important to develop and practice concise, key statements using plain language.

General tips

RECORDED INTERVIEWS CAN BE EXERCISES IN BREVITY

- › The interviewer is likely to use only one of your answers.
- › Do not refer to previous answers, as the audience probably won't have that context, and you will reduce the number of responses the reporter can use.
- › Broadcasters need short, plain language sound bites (20 seconds long, or less).

THINK OF LIVE AND LIVE-TO-TAPE INTERVIEWS AS CONVERSATIONAL EXCHANGES

- › Live-to-tape means the pre-recorded interview runs unedited as if it's live.
- › These are more conversational exchanges, so responses should be shorter than one minute long.

THE PRE-INTERVIEW IS LIKE A SNEAK PEEK TO THE ACTUAL INTERVIEW

- › Pre-interviews give journalists or producers a sense of how you will answer certain questions, and identify any obstacles for the audience.
- › You can get a sense of the type of questions that will be asked during the actual interview, and how to steer conversation towards your key messages.
- › Be aware: Pre-interviews are usually recorded, and may end up on air.

THE ON-CAMPUS TELEVISION STUDIO IS AVAILABLE TO CONNECT YOU TO REPORTERS AROUND THE WORLD

- › The on-campus double-ender TV studio allows us to connect with news outlets across the world.
- › Faculty and media can arrange to use the studio through the media relations team.

Television

YES, APPEARANCE DOES MATTER

- › Make-up service is not available for newsroom or campus studio interviews, so arrive prepared.
- › Many people prefer to use face powder or make-up to combat the effects of the studio's bright lights on their skin.
- › Avoid wearing all-black or all-white clothing. Small, busy or check patterns and skinny stripes often create a distracting strobe effect on camera.
- › Ensure your eyeglasses are clean and smear-free.

KEEP FOCUSED

- › If the interviewer is with you, imagine the conversation being between you and the interviewer, so look at the reporter, not the camera.
- › Avoid looking around, rocking back and forth in your chair or wiggling your foot.
- › If the interviewer is in a remote location, you will be instructed where to look for the interview's entire duration, which could be directly into the camera.

LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

- › Consider a relevant location, such as your office or lab, if the interview isn't in a studio.
- › You may be asked to record B-roll footage/set-up shots to illustrate the reporter's description of you in the script. You could be working at your computer, talking on the telephone or using equipment. Journalists often appreciate interesting shot suggestions that are more relevant to the story, so consider what you could do for them.

*Succinct, clear,
accessible language
is more important in
broadcast interviews
than in print interviews
because you are
speaking directly to
the audience. Speak in
accessible language and
get to the heart
of your point quickly.*

Radio

TONE, INFLECTION AND CLEAR LANGUAGE ARE KEY

- › Create key messages that are clear and easily understandable. Have them in point form but do not read or refer to them in the interview.
- › Keep your responses short – no longer than 20 seconds in length.

DO AWAY WITH DISTRACTIONS AND DISRUPTIONS

- › Your radio interviews will often be done by phone, so audio quality is important. Voice clarity is better on a land line, than on a mobile phone.
- › Ensure you're in a quiet room where interruptions and ambient noise are unlikely.

Video call

LIKE TV, BUT DIFFERENT

- › Takes place over the Internet using the webcam on your computer. Phones or tablets are not recommended because they often need to be hand-held.
- › Familiarize yourself with the technology before the interview happens.
- › Raise your laptop so that the webcam is eye level. Do not look down or up at the camera.
- › Sit back from the computer so that your face doesn't have selfie distortion from being too close to the camera.
- › Earbuds are often recommended to reduce echo. The journalist will let you know.
- › Keep your eyes fixed on the webcam during the interview and not at yourself on the screen.

PRINT AND ONLINE INTERVIEWS

All the news that's fit to print

Print and online reporters often have the opportunity to go into greater depth and detail than broadcast journalists. While there's less pressure to be succinct, there are usually more opportunities to be quoted.

Visuals: images and videos

Keep in mind visuals, such as videos or photographs, that could accompany the story.

- › Mention any strong visual elements that may be of interest to the journalist.
- › Be sure to have current high-resolution headshots, as you may be asked to provide one to include with the article.
- › News items with photos or video have greater potential for pick up than ones without.

Print and online reporters can go into depth and detail, which means you may have more opportunities to be quoted.

OP-EDS

Your opinion matters

Op-eds (an abbreviation of opposite the editorial page) are not editorials or a letter to the editor, but articles identified with a writer who is unaffiliated with the newspaper's editorial board. These articles are extremely useful ways for academics to engage with the media, because they recognize the writer and their institution, and can have tremendous sway over readers.

What are the rules to writing op-eds?

Keep in mind there is hot competition to be included in the op-ed page (The Globe and Mail receives more than 30 submissions daily, but generally has room for three or four articles). The University's media relations team can help faculty craft engaging op-ed pieces and pitch them to appropriate media outlets, but here's a summary of the key points to keep in mind:

- › Aim for 600 to 650 words (maximum 800 words); be prepared to work with the media outlet on rapid revisions and edits.
- › Ideally, submit the article by 2 p.m. the day the original article appeared.
- › Always include your full contact details. These will not be printed, but will be used so the media outlet can contact you.
- › News outlets look for exclusivity. Do not shop your op-ed to another media outlet until you receive a rejection.
- › Due to limited space in print publications, your copy may appear online only.

What makes an engaging op-ed?

- › Pieces written in anticipation of likely news events such as court cases or government decisions. They can set the tone for the event's coverage.
- › Look for argument, not agreement, in controversial news topics.
- › Focus on one topic and provide expert commentary that is unlikely to be found elsewhere.
- › Look for news hooks for your op-ed. Hooks are critical, newsworthy facts that capture media and public attention.
- › Write in the active voice, in traditional three-point-essay style.
- › Avoid jargon and complex phrasing. Imagine your audience is first-year undergraduate students, not an academic or technical audience.

Online commentary is not a failure, as the same standards apply to a publication's online content as it does their traditional content. In fact, online readership can be higher than print readership, distributing your content further.

What Experts Say



Speaking with the media has helped my profile as a researcher, and increased my contact with decision-makers and prospective students. As a publicly funded researcher, it also enhances the real-world impact of my work.

DAVID HAMMOND
Professor, School of Public Health and
Health Systems
CIHR/PHAC Applied Public Health Chair



By appearing in the media on a regular basis on international affairs, I have attracted the attention of policy-makers on important issues. This connection opens up funding and network opportunities. My willingness to engage with the media shows funders that money will be well spent through disseminating the findings of research projects and in spurring public debate.

BESSMA MOMANI
Professor, Political Science
Senior Fellow, Centre for International
Governance and Innovation (CIGI)

CORRECTIONS AND REBUTTALS

When you don't like what you see

There are a few key points to remember about journalism:

- › Journalists report the facts, and do not promote a person or company.
- › It's impossible to be mentioned in every article that's related to your work.
- › Mistakes sometimes happen.

IS IT REALLY AN ERROR?

You may see the finished story to find that your interview didn't go as well as you had planned, and you may feel the reporter got it wrong. Here are some questions to ask yourself before you call the media relations department to demand a correction:

- › Have you been misquoted, or have your words been edited so the meaning is changed?
- › Are the facts incorrect?
- › Is the impression inaccurate because of omitted (relevant) facts?

CORRECTING ERRORS

Tight deadlines and limited resources mean mistakes happen. Yesterday's fact checkers may not exist today in some media outlets, so sometimes unintentional mistakes make it through to print. Keep in mind:

- › Reporters often don't write their own headlines, and may be just as annoyed as you are about misleading or sensationalist headlines.
- › The media generally only correct factual errors that interfere with understanding.
- › Simple corrections such as misspelled names or errors can be easily corrected by going directly to the reporter. It's often best to work through the media relations team.

Contact the media relations team if you feel you've been seriously misquoted or if there are major mistakes in reporting. They will work with you and the journalist to take appropriate corrective action.

I DIDN'T GET THE CORRECTION OR I SAW AN ARTICLE THAT I DISAGREE WITH. NOW WHAT?

You have some options to get across your thoughts and views. Keep in mind that news gets old fast, so be sure to work quickly to take advantage of these opportunities.

REBUTTAL LETTERS AND ARTICLES

Uncorrected mistakes could take on a life of their own and colour future reporting. Rebuttal letters and articles are good tools to correct facts. Submit the letter or article no later than 2 p.m. of the day the article appeared. Some papers have a corrections policy and will always correct inaccuracies. Using online forms can sometimes be more effective than writing a letter.

Most reporters record their interviews, so it's relatively easy to verify quotations or points made.

CATCHING THE MEDIA'S EYE

Reaching out to the media

Every day, hundreds of people and organizations send to journalists and media outlets emails, calls, social media messages and media releases, hoping to get airtime or column inches. With so many people craving attention, you need to ensure your story idea hits the right note.

Think like a reporter: Is it newsworthy?

The University's media relations team can help assess newsworthiness and frame your story to encourage media coverage. To help you get into the right frame of mind, there are five factors to consider:

- > **Timing:** Is it current?
- > **Significance:** How many people will it affect, and how? Does it matter to the media outlet's audience?
- > **Proximity:** In general, a story that directly impacts a local group is more likely to be covered by local media, as opposed to the national media.
- > **Prominence:** What, who or where is affected, and how?
- > **Human interest:** What's the story's emotional appeal?

Talk and write like a reporter

Journalistic writing is very different from academic writing. If you want to reach a reporter, you should demonstrate that you can talk their language:

- › Follow the University Writing Style Guide as your primary stylebook.
- › Refer to the latest editions of Canadian Press Stylebook and Caps and Spelling, its companion guide.
- › If a word's spelling is not found in Caps and Spelling, consult the Canadian Oxford English Dictionary (COD).
- › To write in journalistic style:
 - Inverted pyramid style: The most fundamental facts appear at the top of the story, in the lead paragraph. Non-essential information appears in the following paragraphs, in order of importance.
 - Keep paragraphs as short as possible – no longer than two or three short sentences.
 - Avoid complex sentence structures.
 - Use short, understandable words, instead of long, complex ones, never use jargon, and avoid acronyms or abbreviations.

Where the University Writing Style Guide disagrees with CP or COD, the University Guide will take precedence.

Call the specialists

The media relations team is responsible for issuing media communications on behalf of the University. These communications are developed in conjunction with faculty and Faculty communications teams. The team should also review all third-party releases, to ensure consistency and to monitor any resulting media coverage.

FIVE FACTORS OF NEWSWORTHINESS

1. Timing
2. Significance
3. Proximity
4. Prominence
5. Human interest

TOOLS OF THE TRADE

Ways to connect

Media releases

The media relations team is responsible for issuing all media releases that pertain to the University. A media release communicates a newsworthy event or subject to the media. Although your Faculty communications staff can help develop media-facing materials, you may be asked to put pen to paper. If so, here are some tips to help you draft media releases:

- › Headlines should be appropriate, catchy and short (ideally less than 65 characters, including spaces).
- › Follow the University Writing Style Guide as well as Canadian Press guidebooks.
- › Write in journalistic style.
- › The contents should not go over one letter page (8.5" x 11"), using Arial font (11-point) type, single-spaced.
- › Read the release aloud to another person, who is not involved with the project you are publicizing. It should be easy to read and the listener should understand it instantly.

Media advisory

A media advisory is a concise media announcement about an event, like an invitation. They are more urgent in tone, and easier to read than a media release. Media advisories are generally issued one or two days before the advertised event. The media relations team is responsible for issuing media advisories. At minimum, a media advisory should contain:

- › A concise summary of the event.
- › The date, time and location of the event.
- › An idea of the photo opportunities at the event.
- › Details of how media should register to attend, if applicable.
- › Contacts for the media relations team.

Experts advisory

Like media releases and advisories, the media relations team is responsible for issuing expert advisories. Expert advisories promote the University's researchers available to comment on current news stories.

- › To be most effective during breaking news, we issue advisories as quickly as possible.
- › Include a quotation from the researcher, which sums up their top message on the issue.
- › The experts must be available to speak to media, including after normal working hours.
- › Provide the expert's full contact details to the media relations team.

THE INVERTED PYRAMID WRITING STYLE IS QUITE DIFFERENT FROM STANDARD ACADEMIC WRITING

- › Lead with the conclusion by stating the most fundamental facts appear at the top of the story.
- › Non-essential information appears in the following paragraphs, in order of importance.

ISSUES AND CRISIS MANAGEMENT AND THE MEDIA

When it hits the fan

Controversies, problems and issues can strike anywhere, at any time. Faculty and staff are encouraged to discuss concerns with the director of media relations and issues management, before issues turn into a crisis.

Issues vs. Crises

An issue is a developing trend or condition that can change how your project, department or organization operates. When this change is good, the strategy is to make them better. When this change is bad, the strategy is to make the issue as positive as possible.

A crisis is a major threat to your project, department, organization or stakeholders that could fundamentally change how you operate. Crises are often public-facing, unexpected, and can negatively impact your or the University's reputation.

It takes years to build a reputation and five minutes to ruin it

When handled well, issues and crises can maintain or improve your reputation. When mishandled, issues and crises can erase years of trust, reputation and relationship-building within a matter of moments.

Call the experts

The University's media relations team are experts in working with local, national and international journalists and media organizations. The team consults with the appropriate campus teams to develop an integrated issue/crisis management and media-handling approach.

When you contact the media relations team about an issue or crisis, have the following information ready:

- › Full contact information for the parties involved, including:
 - University telephone and mobile phone, numbers, and email addresses.
 - Personal telephone and email addresses.
- › Two or three paragraphs of succinct background information.
- › A timeline of events to date, to quickly understand issue evolution.
- › A list of questions you wouldn't want to be asked.

Although crises are generally unpredictable, an ineffectively managed issue could become a crisis.

THE UNIVERSITY'S MEDIA RELATIONS TEAM

*Your media relations, issues management
and crisis communications specialists*

The University of Waterloo has a team of trained media, reputation and strategic communications specialists available to help you communicate your work and your expertise to the media and general public. They are responsible for:

- › Issuing press releases, media advisories and expert advisories.
- › Arranging and facilitating the University's media coverage.
- › Promoting our experts to the media.
- › The Experts Guide, a database of researchers available to help with media enquiries.
- › Assisting University faculty, students and staff with media interactions.
- › Monitoring and reporting the University's news coverage.

The media relations team needs to know

Let the team know about media activity and potential media engagement, to help them manage the University's branding and engagement, as well as help you become successful at your own communications goals. Please let them know:

- › When you have engaged with or have been contacted by the media, for interviews, articles, or letters to the editor.

*To sign up for Waterloo NewsWatch,
please contact media relations.*

- › If another organization promotes your academic work, so that the team can provide general advice, help organize promotion in other channels, and/or properly refer media enquiries.
- › Before staff engage with the media.

Engage the media relations team

Faculty members are encouraged to draw upon the media relations team's expertise to effectively mobilize knowledge and translate research to the media and general audiences. Here's what the team can do for you:

PROACTIVE MEDIA RELATIONS SUPPORT – WHEN YOU WANT TO REACH OUT

- › Assess the newsworthiness of stories, along with recommendations on how, when and where to promote the story.

REACTIVE MEDIA RELATIONS – WHEN THE MEDIA REACHES YOU

- › Advise on ways to deal with media requests and interviews.

ASSISTANCE WITH JOURNALISTS ON CAMPUS

- › Provide on-campus assistance with reporters.
- › Make the University's broadcast-ready, double-ender studio available to facilitate appearances on national and international TV broadcasts.
- › Provide media parking passes for journalists who come to campus for events or interviews.

COACHING

- › Provide one-on-one media coaching.
- › Offer periodic media training workshops for the greater campus community.

ISSUES AND CRISIS MANAGEMENT

- › Offer guidance on how to handle difficult or controversial issues.
- › Provide strategic communications guidance during a crisis.

OUR MEDIA RELATIONS TEAM IS HERE TO ASSIST FACULTY AND STAFF WITH:

- › Proactive media relations
- › Reactive media relations
- › Assistance with journalists on campus
- › Media relations coaching and training
- › Issues and crisis management

Staff members are required to contact the media relations team before engaging with a journalist.

UNIVERSITY OF
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