

Critical Skills for Talking to the Media

Science & Innovation

Student Session

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After a review of the state of American journalism with regard to scientists, the stories they tell, and ways to reach a broad audience, two veteran journalists (one print, one radio) will demonstrate, using volunteers from the audience, how to prepare for and handle interviews on all media platforms. Through role playing and audience feedback, all participants will get a feel for how to carry out this critical function -- which has never been more important.

Summary of Student Session:

This workshop highlighted skills scientists can use when talking to the media:

- Assess the audience to which your piece (radio interview, press release, etc.) will be directed to and adjust the story and language based on that.
 - Explain what you do in plain language such as if you were to explain it to a 14 year old.
 - Use visual metaphors to support your content, especially with abstract concepts and topics.
 - Use frequencies such as '1 in a 100 people' instead of probabilities (1%), they are more visual and understandable.
 - Use magnitudes instead of metrics to describe sizes to send a message: an iceberg of the size of Delaware.
 - State when your discovery was done to give a mental location.
 - Be concise.
 - Avoid jargon.
 - Lead the interview
- Answer these important questions:
 - What is your question?
 - Who cares? (aka why is your research important?)
 - They had the opportunity to interact with the journalists in improvisation training sessions to find out where our strengths and weaknesses were in terms of our media speech.