

Wellcome Trust

We are a global charitable foundation dedicated to achieving extraordinary improvements in human and animal health.

We support the brightest minds in biomedical research and the medical humanities. Our breadth of support includes public engagement, education and the application of research to improve health.

We are independent of both political and commercial interests.

Wellcome Trust

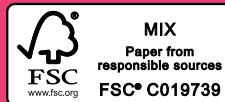
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Why work with the *media?*



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Why work with the media?

There's a real appetite among the public to engage with science. It's partly fascination at the wonders of science, but partly a desire to understand the issues that face our society.

We believe researchers should engage with the public, to explain and discuss their work. This helps promote informed debate around scientific research where there are ethical issues, such as the use of embryonic stem cells, and it can convey the wonder of science – it may even encourage the next generation of scientists.

There are many ways to engage with the public, from school visits and talks at science festivals through to Café Scientifiques. Speaking to the media can be a particularly effective method and reaches a wide audience: the *BBC News at Ten* typically reaches several million viewers while upwards of 3 million people read the *Sun*.

UK science journalism is among the best in the world. Most national newspapers and broadcasters have science and health correspondents, who are knowledgeable and responsible. Even so, many scientists are apprehensive about dealing with the media: “What if they ‘dumb down’ my science or over-hype it? What if I am misquoted?”

This guide is intended to provide help when you have a story to tell and show you that working with the media needn't be so daunting after all. It is just one of the tools available to support our researchers in their public engagement activities. To find out more about how we can help you, visit:

www.wellcome.ac.uk/researchersupport

Do you have a story to tell?

Are you about to publish an interesting research paper? Have you reached a significant milestone in your research? Do you need to recruit volunteers for your study?

If so, please let the Wellcome Trust Media Office know. We can advise on the best way to tell the story, help prepare a press release or news story, and even offer media training.

Timing is essential: the sooner you can alert us, the better – for example, as soon as your paper has been accepted. You can speak to your press office ahead of publication and you will not be breaking the journal's embargo by doing so. We prefer at least a week's notice to prepare a press release or brief journalists, but we can turn press releases around faster if necessary.

We work closely with other press offices, too, to ensure that we coordinate our approach – with other funders, university press offices and journal press offices. If you approach your own institution's press office first, please ask them to get in touch with us, too.

Of course, not every story will be of interest to the national media. We can advise you on whether we think they will be interested. But even if we don't issue a press release, we have plenty of scope to cover research stories on our website or blog.

Be an expert

We often receive requests for experts in particular areas in the news, for example swine flu or genetic testing. Please let us know if you would be prepared to act as an expert in your area.

Bear in mind that 'an expert' means different things to the public than to your peers. Even if you don't consider yourself an expert in this particular area, your knowledge is likely to be much higher than that of the majority of people.



One of the main tools that we use to communicate with journalists is the press release.



A press release reads like a news story, with key information at the top and less important information further down (the opposite of a scientific paper!). The language may be targeted towards a particular sector; for example, if it is aimed at the national media, it will be more ‘lay friendly’ than if it is targeted at the scientific press. A good press release should answer all the questions a journalist needs to know.

A note of caution about ‘the Sundays’, such as the *Sunday Times*. In the past, journalists from these publications have broken embargoes. We recommend that you do not speak to journalists on these publications about forthcoming publications. However, they can be a useful outlet for stories that are not linked to journal papers, where the journalist has time to research a story in more depth.

The key elements of a press release are:

1 Embargo

An embargo is a point in time after which a story may appear in the media. For academic papers, it will be set by the journal – for example, *Nature* embargoes are often 18.00 (GMT) on a Wednesday. We usually embargo our stories for 00.01 – this works in favour of the *Today* programme and national newspapers, where most of our stories are targeted.

Most journalists abide by embargoes, so you can speak to them ahead of the embargo. However, it is worth reminding them of the embargo if one exists. Some publications have strict rules about when you may speak to a journalist. If in doubt, check with the Wellcome Trust Media Office or the journal’s press office.

2 Headline

This will sum up the story in one line.

3 Opening paragraph

The first paragraph is crucial to the press release. Journalists claim to spend on average three seconds reading a press release – if the story doesn’t grab them straight away, it may get binned!

4 Context

It is helpful to include context in the press release. For example, a press release about the discovery of a gene implicated in type 2 diabetes might include a short description of the disease, statistics on how many people it affects and information about genes previously discovered.

5 Quotes

Quotes give colour to a press release. They need to be short, punchy and tell part of the story. We will often draft a quote on your behalf, based on comments that you have made when we have spoken or emailed. Please don't be surprised by this process – if you are not happy with your quote, tell us and we will change it!

6 Contact details

We will usually only include the contact details of the Wellcome Trust Media Office and your institution's press office, not your own details. This will help to protect you from a barrage of calls – if the research is widely picked up, we can prioritise interview requests on your behalf.

7 Notes for editors

At the end of the press release, there will be details of your paper. We will also include 'boilerplates' (paragraphs summarising the activities of those organisations involved – funders, universities, etc.).

What to expect

What happens after the press release has been issued? Will your phone be ringing off the hook with interview requests from journalists?

Once the press release has been issued, you may be contacted by journalists wishing to speak to you about your research in more detail.

It is very important that you notify us if you will not be available to speak to journalists, particularly for a couple of days ahead of the embargo and the day that it is published. If you cannot be contacted by landline or mobile phone during that period, then please try to suggest someone who can speak on your behalf.

Unfortunately, no matter how remarkable the research, it is impossible to predict the level of interest from journalists. The media have only a limited amount of space or airtime and stories compete for attention. Science stories compete with other science stories as well as with everything else happening in the news.

Even if you have spoken to a journalist, the story is not necessarily guaranteed to appear. Some journalists may write four or five stories per day, only one or two of which make it into the paper. This is known in the trade as 'spiking'. Similarly, a radio interview that has been lined up may be cancelled at the last minute.

However, sometimes spiked stories or longer versions of print articles may appear on a newspaper's website. Remember – more people read stories online than in newspapers nowadays.

Radio interviews will be either live or pre-recorded. You will usually be asked to go into a studio or use an ISDN line – this gives a much clearer broadcast than over the phone. They will usually arrange transport for you if you need it. Radio stations often pick up stories on the day that your research is published, particularly if producers read the story in a newspaper or hear it elsewhere.

You may also receive calls from TV stations asking to film in your lab – this will usually be the day before your research is published or even two or three days in advance. Filming can be time-consuming and disruptive. It can take a couple of hours to film a piece less than a couple of minutes long. But TV news reaches much larger audiences and has more impact, so is worth doing. Your institution's press office may be able to help to coordinate filming, arranging access and parking, etc.

Even if you do not get contacted by any journalists immediately, this does not mean that the story will be ignored. If a journalist is busy, they may write the story using only the information in the press release, without speaking to you directly. Sometimes they will keep the story and use it a later date, often in a broader feature.

If you are feeling swamped by media requests, then speak to the Wellcome Trust Media Office or your press office and we can advise on which media to prioritise or can politely decline requests on your behalf.

The use of animals in research – should you speak out?

We believe that it is important to be open about research using animals. However, the final decision to talk about your work if it involves animals is up to you and your institution.

Work involving invertebrates and rodents is less emotive and therefore less controversial than that involving primates and rarely receives negative coverage or a 'backlash' from animal rights activists.

Some useful resources include:

- Understanding Animal Research has a wealth of information and resources on its website:
www.understandinganimalresearch.org.uk
- Support4rs can give advice on dealing with animal extremism:
www.support4rs.com



Managing controversy

If your research has the potential for controversy, then it is essential that you notify your press office.

Even if you do not wish to actively promote the research, it is still possible that journalists will pick up on the research and wish to report it. Be prepared!

Your press office should be able to advise on the best course of action. This may be:

- preparing a reactive press release in case the research is picked up
- preparing a background, internal Q&A based on the research, which will include various questions that the researchers might anticipate being asked by a journalist
- conducting mock interviews with the press office to practise what you will say.

Generally, we would recommend engaging with the media rather than stonewalling them. If you don't speak to the media, someone else may well do – it is better to get your message across.

The Science Media Centre also offers advice and support on dealing with controversial issues and regularly holds press briefings on issues such as mobile phones and cancer risk, genetic modification, and climate change research.

www.sciencemediacentre.org



Tips for speaking to the media

No interview will be the same, and print, radio and TV interviews all differ significantly. However, there are a few tips to consider when doing any interview.

Preparing for your interview

- Write down three key points that you wish to get across.
- Think about what questions you might get asked and how you would respond. What is the one question you wouldn't want to be asked?
- Imagine how you would explain this research to a friend in the pub.
- Try to use analogies to illustrate complex points.
- Be careful of using statistics: say 'one in three' or 'half' rather than '30 per cent' or '50 per cent'.
- Be particularly careful of statistics when you are discussing risk (see 'Communicating Risk in a Soundbite' at www.sciencemediacentre.org for tips).
- Ask your press office to run through a 'mock interview' if you think it will be helpful.

Speaking to print journalists

- If a journalist calls you and you would like to gather your thoughts, ask if you can call them back in ten minutes.
- Journalists often work to tight deadlines. If they ask you to return their call, please do so as soon as possible, preferably within the hour.
- Don't expect the journalist to show you a copy of the article before it is published.
- Be careful of questions that start: "So what you are saying is X, Y, Z". Answer in your own words.
- Don't let the interviewer draw you into an area you don't feel comfortable talking about.
- Beware of throwaway comments: assume that everything you say will be quoted, even if the journalist has closed their notebook.

- Do not speak ‘off the record’ unless you know you can trust the journalist not to repeat or report your comments.
- Please ask the journalist to say that the research was funded by the Wellcome Trust.

Broadcast interviews

What to ask before you agree to be interviewed

- What is the programme and what is its audience?
- What is the interview about and what areas will be covered?
- Is anyone else being interviewed, and if so who? Will you be discussing the issue with them?
- How long will the interview last?
- Is it live or pre-recorded?
- Where will the interview take place? Can they arrange transport?

When being interviewed

- Be positive, calm and courteous.
- Remember your audience – you are talking to the public, not your peers. Use colloquial language and avoid jargon, acronyms or long titles.
- Don’t use the interviewer’s name as it can sound overly familiar.
- Try not to avoid answering questions as it can sound like you have something to hide.

- Don’t fall for the interviewer’s pregnant pause encouraging you to carry on.
- If the interviewer is trying to take you down a route that you are not comfortable discussing, answer the question briefly and then say something like: “What is important...” or “What we have found in this research...” to bring it back to your key messages.
- Please mention that the research was funded by the Wellcome Trust if possible.

For radio

- Sound convincing and enthusiastic.
- Avoid ‘ums’ and ‘ahs’.
- Remember you are effectively talking to one person listening to the radio not to a vast audience.

For television

- Remember that you are not talking to thousands but individuals in front of their TV.
- Look at the interviewer – pay no attention to the camera.
- Sit firmly upright in your chair. Don’t move or rock your chair.
- Don’t wear anything distracting, e.g. dangly earrings or small stripes and checks (which cause problems for television).
- Don’t move or relax at the end of the interview until you’ve been told to – the camera may still be on you.

Online media

It’s not just the traditional media – newspapers and broadcasters – that are interested in the science stories.

These days science stories are reported, discussed (and criticised) everywhere online – on blogs, Twitter, chat forums and so on.

Internet coverage has some advantages: it reaches a wide audience, can be more engaging and – if the journalist makes an error – is easier to correct. You’ll often see a comments section under a news or blog piece, which can generate interesting, often heated discussion. It can also mean that a potentially negative story can blow up to a crisis within hours or even minutes on social networks such as Twitter.

All media outlets now have an online presence, offering much more content than their print or broadcast editions. On the *Guardian* website, for example, you may see your research reported in a news article, discussed in a blog post, accompanied by a gallery of images or video and discussed on its weekly *Guardian Science Podcast*,

When you are telling us about your research, please think about what additional content you can offer. Do you have any visually striking images that we could provide or any footage of your research? Would you be willing to write a comment piece to accompany news coverage?

Contact from patients and their families

If your research relates to a particular disease, be prepared to be contacted by patients and their families – even if your work is basic science or at a very early stage, for example if you have found a gene implicated in Crohn's disease.

Don't feel compelled to answer every enquiry personally, but be sympathetic. You may wish to ask your press office to respond on your behalf. You may be able to draft a generic statement that you can respond with. For example:

