# Physics, outreach and journalism

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### **EL PAÍS**

with thanks to Pampa G. Molina, Agencia SINC





Horizon 2020



# apology

/əˈpɒlədʒi/

noun

1. a regretful acknowledgement of an offence or failure.

/əˈpɒlədʒi/

noun

2. a formal written defence of one's opinions or conduct.

# Why do science?

# Why do science journalism?

# Science is news: tell people about it!

## Journalist

- Learning
- Inform policy
- Combat prejudice
- Enable participation in democracy
- Spread the love
- Check science
- It's a job

### Scientist

- Inform policy
- Combat prejudice
- Enable participation in democracy
- Spread the love
- Career benefits







CAREER FEATURE · 07 AUGUST 2018

# How to work with your institution's press office to maximize the reach of your work

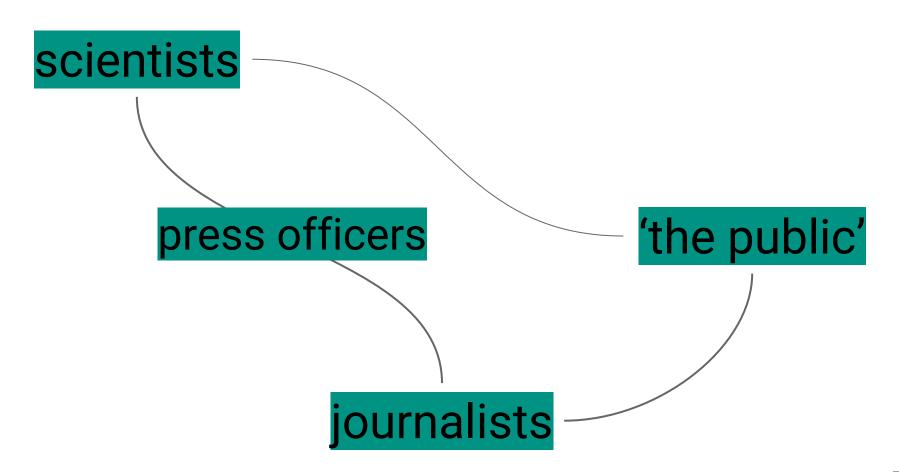
Want your study to make the headlines? You can get help with that.

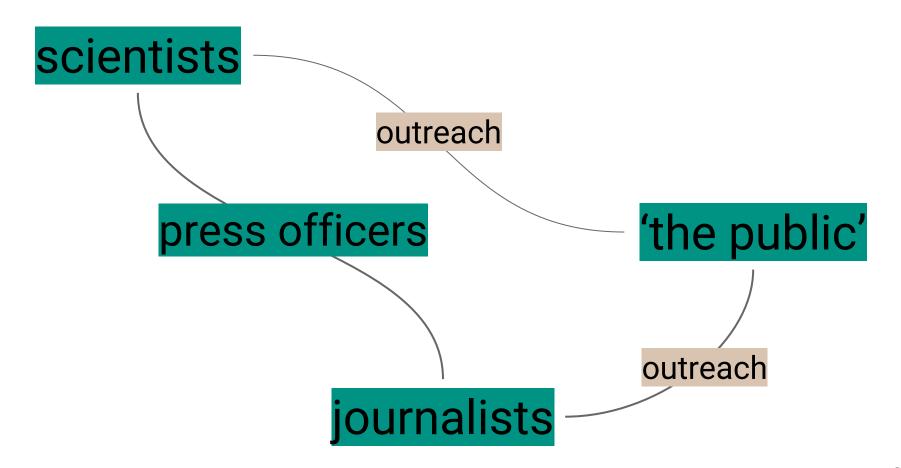
Roberta Kwok

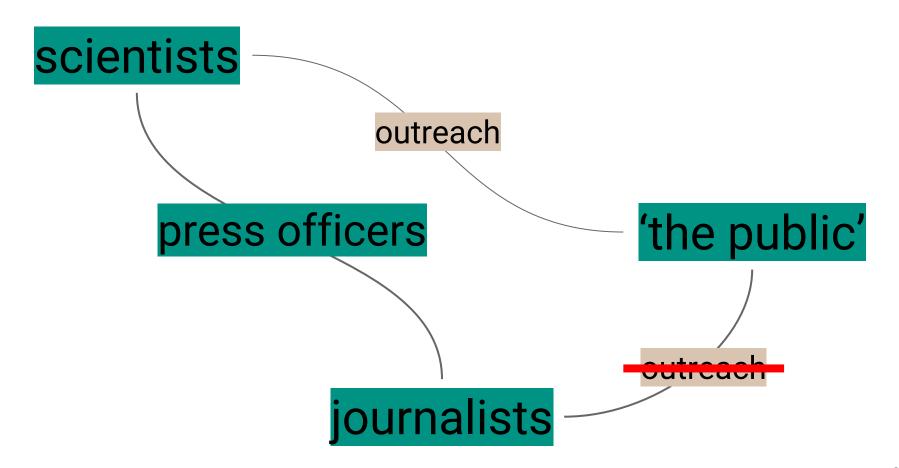
Megan Thoemmes knows first-hand that a good press officer can catapult scientific discoveries into the media spotlight.



https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-018-05896-2









### https://www.nature.com/articles/4591033a

Editorial | Published: 24 June 2009

# Cheerleader or watchdog?

Nature 459, 1033 (25 June 2009) | Download Citation ±

Science journalism is under threat. What can scientists do to help?

What should any researcher expect from a journalist beyond the keen intelligence needed to see the newsworthiness of the researcher's work, and the ability to spell his or her name correctly?

### Scientist



## Journalist

Conclusions require evidence

Evidence should be open to everyone

Everything is subject to question

but...

- science journalism is rare
- the business model is ruthless

### How I find stories

1. Embargoed papers

4. Active scouring of journals

2. Press releases

5. Following topics of interest

3. Contacts

6. Events

### How I decide whether to write an article

#### Scientific relevance

#### Informative interest

"Who cares?" / "What does this mean for me?"

however, in the real world...

- Constraints like time, personnel and materials
- Available resources like
  - Press release
  - Availability for interviews
  - The paper (often with an embargo, in advance)
  - Images & videos

# Three rules (there are more)

- 1. Responsibility. The journalist choses what science reaches 'the public'. We are gatekeepers of information.
- 2. More detail, less clarity. If you try to tell everything, you will bore. You have no right to be boring.
- **3. Know your audience.** Nobody *has* to read science. Readers aren't preparing for a test.

— Pampa G. Molina

# 1. Responsibility

#### The verbs we want to use

demonstrates

proves

revolutionises

produces

provokes

causes

#### The verbs we need to use

suggests

corroborates

confirms

is associated to

has correlation with

is linked to

# 2. More detail, less clarity

#### **Common tensions**

"Can I see the article before it is published?"

"I don't have time to explain this to journalists"

"Your headline is inaccurate"

# 3. Audience

"No one will ever complain because you have made something too easy to understand."

"Words like shallow, facile [...] are not insults to a journalist. The whole point of paying for a newspaper is that you want **information that slides down easily and quickly**, without footnotes or obscure references." "Nobody has to read this crap."

"People will always respond to something close to them. Concerned citizens of south London should care more about economic reform in Surinam than about Millwall's fate on Saturday, but mostly they don't. Accept it."

Tim Radford









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# Help me (help you)

- 1. Tip me. Email me, @ me, call me.
- 2. Be available. Be quick: hours, not days.
- 3. Tell me a **story.** In the first person. What did *you* do?
- 4. Help me **quote** you.
- 5. Give me certainty.
  - a. Tell me exactly what your research proves/implies.
  - b. Tell me what it doesn't prove/imply.
- 6. You can offer to fact-check. But don't demand it.
- 7. Allow me to seek **opinions**. I need independent voices.

# Thank you

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This project has received funding/support from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under the Marie Sklodowska-Curie grant agreement no. 674896



#### Horizon 2020

