

Physics, outreach and journalism

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EL PAÍS

with thanks to Pampa G. Molina, Agencia SINC



Horizon 2020



apology

/ə'pɒlədʒi/

noun

1. a regretful acknowledgement of an offence or failure.

/ə'pɒlədʒi/

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

- ㄟ(ツ)ㄟ
- Inform policy
- Combat prejudice
- Enable participation in democracy
- Spread the love
- ㄟ(ツ)ㄟ
- **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>

scientists

press officers

journalists

'the public'



scientists

outreach

press officers

'the public'

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scientists

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~~outreach~~

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

2. Press releases

3. Contacts

4. Active scouring of journals

5. Following topics of interest

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 chooses 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

scientists

So, my practical
advice to you...

press officers

'the public'

journalists

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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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neutrinos, dark matter & dark energy physics

Horizon 2020

