

MEDIA CHEAT SHEET

What media opportunities could I seize?

Media availability notes. The science landscape is huge, and journalists often need information on deadline. With your permission, the media professionals at Climate Nexus will include you in a list of experts whom reporters can contact for additional information, quotes, or simple verification when a current event or timely topic related to your expertise arises.

Translating science for the public and communications team. Scientific research contains technical speak and statistical detail that require careful communication to ensure public understanding.

Rapid response. A key part of our work involves diffusing potentially damaging or misleading climate science narratives before they gain traction. You can help us set the record straight by lending your expertise when such opportunities arise.

Individual opportunities. Aside from the organized, periodic opportunities described above, there are many other ways that you can contribute to media conversations about climate science. Climate Nexus can help you identify media opportunities like op-eds, letters to the editor, and public appearances that will give you a chance to join these important discussions.

Developing your message to the media

Before your interview, identify the two or three points or messages you want to convey.

Match message with news medium.

- A seasoned reporter writing a feature will have more space and knowledge about the issue and the research process. Ask the reporter about the news format (news brief, TV interview, long-form print feature) so you can deliver what's expected during the time allotted.

Lead with your key message point. Given deadline pressures, you may only have time to deliver one point.

Don't equivocate. If you have to use qualifiers to discuss something, return to your core message before moving on.

Use persuasive **data points** to support your argument.

- Your research/personal experience: Link research or peer-reviewed findings to what you've seen in your lab or teaching experience.
- Emphasize breadth of evidence: Describe the broad body of research across various disciplines that support your point.

Express your values and use appropriate **emotion**.

- Messages resonate when they match a reader's or viewer's values.
- Speak not only as a scientist but also as a person: What would you do as a parent/neighbor/policymaker in this situation?

Use **metaphors** or "**word pictures**" that your audience can visualize.

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Interview tips

Preparation

- Always ask the journalist's deadline ahead of time, so you know how much time you have to provide answers or additional information.
- Consider which messaging points you can deliver well given interview time constraints.
- Have all background materials at your fingertips, in print or hyperlink format.

During the interview

- Assume that everything you say during a phone or in-person conversation will be included in the story and attributed to you. The only exception is when you tell the reporter before the interview that you will talk "on background only, not for attribution." In other words, you will talk with the reporter as an unnamed source only.
- Don't be put off by a reporter who asks to tape your conversation. It is standard procedure and increases the likelihood you will be quoted accurately.
- Speak in easily understandable terms. Avoid jargon when possible, and try to explain scientific concepts with metaphors.
- Use anecdotes to humanize and explain your topic: "enough widgets to fill Yankee Stadium" is better than "575,000 widgets."
- Don't be afraid to pause or consider a question. Be as thoughtful and thorough as you can.
- If you don't know an answer or can't provide specifics on the spot, let the reporter know you will track down the facts or direct them to someone who can answer their questions.
- Don't over answer. When you're satisfied with your reply, stop.
- Don't ever lie to a reporter.

Follow-up

- Sending a short email with relevant links — "following are a few more resources that may be helpful" — is a great way to provide further context for the story and strengthen your working relationship with a journalist.
- Expect to be edited. Your viewpoint will rarely be the only one included in the story. Good reporters always consult with multiple sources and often try to balance viewpoints in their pieces.
- Verbally highlight your key points with phrases like, "The most important thing is..." or "I think the bottom line is..."
- Be yourself. Don't try to reinvent yourself for an interview because you won't appear credible.
- If you inadvertently offer misleading or incorrect information, correct yourself as soon as you recognize the error.