



## Extension and Experiment Station Communications

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# Working With Reporters

*How newspaper, radio and TV reporters work and what their needs are*

- Are usually writing for the general public. They first ask, "Why is this important to the public?" Be prepared to answer this.
- Newspaper deadlines depend on if the paper is a weekly or daily. Give a reporter plenty of notice before pitching a story about an event. If it's a weekly paper, give three weeks notice. Don't give more than four, otherwise the reporter may forget about it.
- Media need visuals. Have high-resolution photos ready. Action photos are best. Avoid posed group shots.
- Reporters need you to talk in layman's terms.
- They're looking for a timely, local angle.
- Journalists are often generalists who aren't experts in science or agriculture.
- General news reporters often get stories assigned to them by their editors. Reporters who have beats often come up with their own story ideas.
- Small newspapers have a small staff, often only an editor, a general news reporter and a high school sports reporter. Because of their limited staff, the easier you make their job, the more likely it is that your story will get covered.
- Journalists use a stylebook as a reference for grammar, spelling, word use and punctuation. Most use The Associated Press Stylebook. So refrain from telling them how to capitalize words, etc.

*How to prepare for, give and follow up on interviews with newspaper, radio or TV media*

- When reporters call, ask 1.) what the story is about, 2.) what the deadline is, 3.) how much knowledge the reporter has about the subject, 4.) if the reporter has covered this subject before, and 5.) what the media outlet is. Then politely ask them if you can call them back in 10 minutes.
- Write down three to four talking points. Ask yourself what do I not want to talk about? How will I handle those topics if asked about them?
- Call back on a landline for clarity, especially for radio.
- Stay on message even if the interview becomes difficult.
- Be prepared to give examples to support what you're saying.
- Don't use jargon. Use comparisons to make technical subjects easy to understand.
- Don't answer a question if you don't know the answer. Refer them to someone who would know.
- Don't speak for other people if asked what they think.
- Don't talk off the record.
- Avoid hypothetical situations.
- Bring helpful information like a business card, fact sheet and statistics and give it to the reporter.
- For a TV interview, don't wear white or shirts with words on them (unless it says OSU) or clothes with busy patterns or lots of jewelry.
- Conduct TV interviews in places with an interesting background (like in a lab or by a stream or at a farm).
- Look at the reporter not the camera.
- Be simple and short in TV and radio interviews. Be able to state each talking point in 15 seconds. Think in terms of sound bites.
- Repeat the question in your answer if it's TV or radio so you're not quoted out of context.
- Email or call the reporter after the interview with any clarifications or answers that you weren't able to provide at the time.
- Don't ask to see the article before it goes to press. You can ask to have your quotes read back to you.