

MEDIA INTERVIEW

GUIDE FOR SCIENTISTS

*Share your stories,
spread our science news!*

Media coverage is a very effective way of getting information out to the different levels of government, donors and the general public and of enabling them to appreciate the value of your research work. Public funding bodies also want to draw media attention to the outcomes of the research studies they fund.

From a broader perspective, well-articulated stories about scientific discoveries and advances help democratise science, demystify beliefs and set the record straight. They also remind policymakers and the public of the importance of basic research and its impacts in our lives.

Highlighting the CRCHUM's research excellence is beneficial not only for the recruitment of researchers, students and talented staff, but also for fundraising and grant applications.

Working with the media can have a positive impact on you, your research teams, your colleagues, your institution and the Université de Montréal.

[Contact our team online](#)

First and foremost, talk to a member of the Media Relations Office to evaluate possibilities for publicizing your research, to help you decide whether to give the interview or not and to discuss questions that you might be asked.

If your research is controversial, be ready to answer hard questions. An interview simulation might be helpful in this case.

→ Before committing, think about these questions:

- What media is it and what type of audience does it reach?
- What is the subject of the interview and what angles will be covered?
- Why are you being contacted now? Is there a connection with something in the news?
- Is someone else also being interviewed? If so, who? Will you be discussing a controversial subject?
- Who will be conducting the interview, where will it take place and how long will it last?
- Will it be live or pre-recorded?
- If the media request is outside your area of expertise, politely decline

By speaking to journalists, you can promote your research team, your scientific field and your organization in the media.

Keep in mind that you don't need to be the most prolific scientist, in terms of publications, to make comments in the media. For audiences, if you work in the field, you're already an expert.

Don't forget that if you refuse the interview, the journalist might interview someone less qualified than you.

PREPARING FOR AN INTERVIEW

- Decide on two or three key messages that you want to convey. They should be brief, powerful and relevant. Would you be able to get them across in the time it takes to go up three floors in an elevator? That's the maximum message length you should aim for;
- When explaining a concept, imagine that you are explaining it to a 12-year-old child;
- Replace medical, scientific and technical jargon with more common terms. Don't use a complex word when a simpler word would do;
- Use easy-to-understand comparisons, analogies and examples to illustrate your ideas and the complex aspects of your study;
- Humanize your figures to give your audience a better sense of the scale or impact.

The point of an interview is not to impress your peers; it's to make yourself understood.

DURING AN INTERVIEW

- Think about your audience:
 - The media are an intermediary that allows you to reach your audience, namely, patients and the public;
 - Use simple language: explain using layman's terms and avoid acronyms, scientific and medical jargon and long titles;
 - Use statistics sparingly and try to use common terms when possible—for example, say “one in four” or “half” rather than “25 percent” or “50 percent”;
 - Be enthusiastic and passionate about your subject; be calm and relaxed;
 - Be conscious of your tone, the pace of delivery and your non-verbal language.
- Listen to the questions and answer simply and naturally;
- Be brief and concise. The interviewer will ask you to comment further if necessary. They also may pause to encourage you to give more information than you had intended to. If you made your point, don't be tempted to fill in the silence;
- If the interview isn't unfolding the way you want it to, remain cordial, but don't hesitate to come back to your key messages with marker words or transitional phrases such as:
 - “The most important thing to remember is...”
 - “What people need to understand (or remember) is...”
 - “That's an important point, but what's even more important is...”
 - “I'm not sure, but what I do know is that...”
 - “That's an interesting point, but what I mean is...”
 - “You say that, but it's not quite accurate. In fact, it's important to understand that....”
- Be humble and honest: if you don't know the answer to a question or if you aren't in a position to respond, say so and briefly say why, if necessary;
- As a rule, nothing is “off the record”. Assume that everything you say could be used as a quote, even if the journalist has put their notebook away or turned off their tape recorder;
- Never say “no comment”, as people may think that you have something to hide. Instead say, “I'm not the best person to ask; you should contact X or Y”.

AFTER AN INTERVIEW

- Read the article, watch the news report or listen to the radio segment to assess your performance and decide what aspects, if any, need to be corrected for the next time;
- Contact the media relations team if there is a factual error and you would like it to be corrected.

FINAL TIPS BEFORE STARTING

PRINT PRESS

- The journalist's deadline (delivery of his or her article) may be 3 hours or 10 minutes away. A quick response is therefore often expected and appreciated;
- The journalist can provide on request the press release or document on which the report is based;
- Because journalists have editorial independence, they don't have their articles reviewed by scientists prior to publication.

TELEVISION

- The on-camera interview can be done:
 - **in virtual mode.** Most often by Skype or Facetime, sometimes by Zoom. Take refuge in an appropriate and quiet place. An office for example. Distractions and disturbances (telephone, e-mail notification, etc.) should be avoided. And remember to look at the camera (not the screen). The audience wants to see your eyes;
 - **in the studio.** Allow time for make-up. Yes, even for men! A thin layer of powder avoids glowing skin on screen;
 - **at the research centre.** Make sure the CHUM media relations people are notified. Set aside time, as there will probably be several takes and the recording of B-roll shots to illustrate the story. Journalists appreciate suggestions for visually interesting shots that are relevant to their stories.
- Yes, image is everything. Beyond the message, people remember the image projected. During TV interviews, wear conservative clothing and avoid plaids and pinstripes, which often create an annoying strobing effect;
- When interviewing, it is advisable to look a journalist in the eye and not to focus on the camera. It is wise not to look around and sway in your chair. Controlling your body language is essential here.

RADIO

- Unlike interviews with print journalists, TV and radio interviews are usually short. Therefore, it's very important to be ready with key messages that are concise and understandable;
- Here, tone, inflection and clear language are essential;
- Smiling before speaking instantly raises the tone of your voice and makes you more cordial;
- Your answers should be short—no longer than 20 seconds;
- Radio interviews are often conducted by telephone, so audio quality is important. Voice clarity is better on a landline than on a mobile phone. Do not use a hands-free kit or speakerphone;
- A quiet room where interruptions are unlikely and ambient noise is limited is preferred.