FOR SCIENTISTS: TIPS ON TALKING WITH JOURNALISTS

This resource was compiled by members of the Energy & Resources Group at the University of California, Berkeley, in collaboration with the Berkeley Graduate School of Journalism. As the Copenhagen negotiations bring worldwide attention to climate change issues, we have drawn on the collective wisdom of leading climate scientists and science journalists to create this list of recommendations, as well as an accompanying set of Tips for Journalists.

KNOW YOUR MESSAGE. Help journalists know what the most important takeaways are by concisely emphasizing your key points. A few tips for effectively communicating your message:

- ***Be prepared:*** Before responding to journalists, organize your findings/message into 3 points (or less) and be able to describe them in a few concise sentences. When appropriate, connect journalists' questions back to your core message.
- ***Anticipate questions:*** Consider asking the journalist about the broad motivations for their story and whether they can provide you with their opening question. This will help you to anticipate possible follow-up questions and collect relevant information ahead of time.
- ***Hone your message:*** This is especially important for radio and video, where you need to create an editable sound bite. In today's sea of information, journalists have little time to grab a reader's attention. Your message will need to be honed for publication or broadcast, so help journalists by being as clear and concise as possible.
- ***Rephrase the question in your answer:*** If you like a question or if the answer you are about to give highlights a particularly important point, be sure to emphasize that it is a good question and then incorporate the question into your response to give a better sound bite.
- ***Fill in gaps:*** Journalists may be missing an important piece of climate research. Feel free to suggest a question that hasn't been asked. In this way, scientists can make sure that critical aspects of scientific inquiry and discovery are communicated to the public. Consider devoting a portion of your conversation to methods, assumptions, and important caveats. Journalists and their readers may benefit from an explanation of how science is done and the limitations of the results.

MAKE IT RELEVANT. Journalists have to explain *why* first and foremost. Help them make climate science meaningful by using examples that connect climate change impacts to local contexts and concerns. One way to highlight the relevance of your knowledge is to present conclusions first; be sure to clearly describe the significance of your research. If possible, use anecdotes that resonate widely.

BE WILLING TO GO BACK TO THE BASICS. Journalists have different levels of scientific training and familiarity with climate science. Successfully communicating your point(s) may require filling in some background information. Be aware of the most frequently confused scientific and climate science concepts and try to explain them in your responses; these include: weather vs. climate, global averages vs. local change, emissions stabilization vs. atmospheric concentrations stabilization, and carbon intensity vs. absolute carbon emissions. See companion *Tips for Journalists* for more details.

LEAD WITH KNOWN POINTS, FOLLOW WITH UNCERTAINTY. Because resolving uncertainties is the name of the game in the scientific community, scientists often jump straight to cutting-edge topics that have higher levels of uncertainty — without referencing the underlying high-certainty stepping-stones. Unfortunately this can lead to much confusion about the state of climate science. Clearly explain what is certain before discussing the nuances of less certain topics. Consider communicating climate uncertainty in terms of a range of human risks.

NUMBERS OUT OF CONTEXT DO NOT MEAN ANYTHING. Scientists often use metrics, such as atmospheric concentrations (ppm), that are not intuitive to a general audience. Remember that not everyone has the scientific background necessary to understand data presented in these metrics. Use analogies, metaphors, and comparisons to give numbers context by framing them in terms of experiences and images that are widely accessible. Also, be conscientious about clearly stating units — for example, specify CO_2 vs. CO_2e.

BE KIND TO BEGINNING REPORTERS. Remember that many journalists may be new to climate science (or science in general), especially given ongoing reorganizations at news agencies and the fact that climate negotiations intersect with political news coverage. Try to gauge the journalist's experience and provide background information when appropriate. If you need to correct a question, be polite. It is important to engage questions that are premised on incorrect assumptions and to take opportunities to clarify confusions.

SEPARATE FACTS FROM OPINIONS. Always distinguish your scientific conclusions from your policy conclusions and value judgments.

REMEMBER THAT YOU DON'T HAVE TO KNOW EVERYTHING. Answer questions that you are qualified to answer. If you are asked a question beyond your expertise: don't guess. You don't have to answer questions you don't feel comfortable answering; instead, refer the journalist to other experts.

PRETEND YOU ARE AT A FAMILY DINNER. Journalists are not trained to translate scientific or climate negotiation jargon. Assist them by using clear simple language in your statements and explanations. If you must use discipline-specific words, make sure to define them clearly. Avoid acronyms. Be conscious of using words that have different meanings in scientific context than in everyday language. For example, "positive feedback" might be construed as *good* feedback rather than *reinforcing* feedback.

DON'T BE SHY. Use the moments before an interview to get to know the journalist. After the interview, give the reporter your contact information and invite him/her to follow up with clarifications or additional questions.

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