Media guide

Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research
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1 Introduction

The Media guide – a practical manual!

As a scientific researcher you normally know how to access or disseminate scientific information within the world of science. For example, via professional journals and congresses.

You can also broadcast your research results to a wider public, via the media (newspapers, news magazines, radio, TV and Internet) or by means of public lectures or exhibitions. Just like you, society is curious about science, due to its impact on daily life. Therefore journalists often knock on scientists’ doors for information about their research as well as for comments about publications by others.

Yet presenting a scientific story to a wider public is a completely different ball game from informing your scientific colleagues. In this guide you can read about making this switch and how to prepare for an interview. Step-by-step we will help you to develop your own publicity plan. You will learn the finer points of writing a press release and we will provide detailed information on how to deal with journalists.
The NWO Media guide is a practical manual with tips and tricks for those who want to generate their own publicity. However, you remain free to call upon the expertise of the communication or public relations department of your organisation!

Finding your way through the Media guide
In nine steps we will help you to make your own publicity plan (chapter 4 Publicity plan and chapter 5 Step-by-step development of the publicity plan). The press release, the ideal resource for informing the media, is considered in detail in section 5.8. Other channels of communication are also available such as a public lecture (chap. 6 Other routes to the public and chap. 10 Giving popular talks) or a website (chap. 6 and chap. 9 Your own website). There are still quite a few preconceptions about dealing with journalists. We indicate what you should be aware of and what to do if things still go wrong (chap. 11 Listening time, chap 12. Viewing time and chap. 13 Avoiding common pitfalls).
In closing we provide a few tips about assistance from your public relations department (chap. 15), language (chap. 16) and communication (chap. 17).
Why aim for a broad public?

There are many reasons for making your research known to a wider public in a popular form. Here are a few suggestions.

For yourself

Research that appears in the newspaper is more frequently cited. This is good for your reputation, your research and/or your research group. The readership is increased. Sometimes that results in unexpected and fruitful contacts with researchers or other like-minded people who operate outside of scientific circles. For example, government officials or business contacts.

For society

Science changes the world. Research results often have considerable consequences for people and society. People question the possibilities and risks of newly developed technologies or, for example, medical research. This interest originates from various groups. Politicians, policymakers, interest groups and societies make use of research results when drawing up policy or annual programmes. They gain most of their information from the radio, television, newspapers, news magazines and the Internet. Your story could also be interesting for them.
Why aim for a broad public? / Media guide

For future scientists
Do you still know who or what inspired you to choose a career in science? Was it an animated teacher, an exciting interview, or a popular scientific television series? You might well be a source of inspiration for others! Many scientists enjoy telling a broader public about their research results in a more educative manner. They enjoy seeing and hearing other people being fascinated by the new information that science generates.

For science
A public that understands scientific developments is in a better position to talk and think about these, and to make choices. Furthermore, such a public can contribute to a more widespread support for science. You can place science higher on the political and public agenda. Tell, explain and debate. Politicians and policymakers are often easier to reach via the media than via professional journals. Scientific articles are not accessible enough for them. However, they follow the press closely.
How can I get noticed?

Sometimes media attention occurs spontaneously. However, if you want your research in the paper or to appear on television then you will need to take the initiative.

Press release

Everyday, editors make a selection from the overwhelming supply of news. Current events play an important role in this. Information which at first sight is unclear or incomprehensible is immediately rejected. Therefore make sure that you present your results clearly. The most suitable form is a press release. It provides the basis for an article of an interview. A well-formulated press release spurs the recipient to contact you for further information. Therefore think very carefully about what you have to say, and summarise this in a lucid and well-structured story with a beginning and an end. Make it clear that you have something interesting to tell, something which fascinates you and will appeal to others. The editorial staff will then decide if they want to use your information and if so which part of it.

Tip!

Journalists need reliable sources who they can consult on a regular basis. If you are known for your well-structured and factual press releases then a journalist may come to regard you as a scientific source and commentator.
4 Publicity plan

A media strategy

You are used to working with a research plan: a plan with objectives, intended result, actions, timeframe, budget, and so forth. The media can best be approached in a similar manner, according to a predetermined strategy.

Publicity plan

We will show you how you can develop a media strategy in nine steps. By carefully following the steps, you will soon have a well-considered publicity plan relevant to your situation and ready for use.

In the next sections (4.1. and 4.2.) we will first of all give you an overview of the steps with a short explanation. Then you can see what you need to do at a glance. Each of the steps will then be described in more detail in chapter 5.

Tip!

The staff at the public relations and/or communication department of your employer, work with successful media strategies on a daily basis. And they also have many contacts with the media. We advise you to make use of this expertise and the media contacts present.
4.1 Publicity plan for your media strategy

Overview 9 steps

Step 1 Formulate your objectives
Step 2 Determine the target groups
Step 3 Select the media
Step 4 Determine the type of presentation
Step 5 Make a plan
Step 6 Clearly define the content
Step 7 Find the newsworthiness
Step 8 Write the press release
Step 9 Maintain the interest

time attention
4.2 Brief description of the publicity plan steps

1 Formulate your objectives
Establish beforehand what you want to achieve with your press presentation. This allows you to check at a later stage whether or not your publicity plan worked. Be realistic. Formulate objectives which lie within your possibilities or those of your research group.

2 Determine the target groups
Establish whom you want to reach with your message. Who are they? What do they find interesting or which information is important for them? What is their information level? Which magazines and newspapers do they read? Which programmes do they listen to or watch? Try to place yourself in their way of thinking and living. That will enable you to fine tune your message to the receiver.

3 Select the media
Define the media for the target groups you want to reach.

4 Determine the type of presentation
Decide the form in which you want to present your story. A press release to selected media is a suitable form. Other examples are a letter to the editor, a public lecture, or in the case of high or special newsworthiness, a press conference.
5  Make a plan
Decide what information you want to publicise and when. Is that at the start of the research, halfway or once the research has been completed and the research results are known? Be aware that the media are more interested in results than in plans or intentions. Find out the deadlines and processing times of the various media and match your sending date to this. That is even more the case for current subjects. Remember that editorial staff need time to assess and process press releases.

6  Clearly define the content
What is the most important conclusion from your research? Decide which results you want to bring to the attention of the journalists. Formulate the main points without using specialist terms. By doing this you will prevent unnecessary and confusing interpretations.

7  Seek the newsworthiness or ‘topical point’
What makes your research newsworthy? Does your information tie in with current events? Are there surprising results or does your research have major consequences for society? Do the results deviate from generally accepted thoughts or feelings? What fascinates you and might interest others as well? By answering these questions you can determine the newsworthiness of your research.
8 Write the press release
Whatever type of presentation you choose, a press release, letter to the editor, or for example, a presentation, you will need to prepare yourself for contact with the press. Formulate concise answers to the 5 ‘w questions’: who, what, where, when, why? Come up with examples that are as concrete as possible. Then think about your answer to the question: ‘so what?’

9 Maintain the interest
Make a follow-up call to editorial staff, and make sure that you are available to answer questions and provide additional information.
5 Step-by-step development of the publicity plan

5.1 What do you want to achieve?

Step 1: Formulate your objectives

– Establish the objective of your publicity plan.
– Formulate feasible goals.
– Make a distinction between short-term and long-term goals.
– Find the resources to realise your goals, and not vice versa.

When is your media campaign successful? Do you just want to inform the public or do you want to achieve more than that? For example, do you want to generate a public debate or to find an investor so that you can market your discovery? How you approach the media depends on your objectives. Formulating your objectives will enable you to check whether your publicity plan had the desired effect.

Timeframe

Publicity is not just about short-term effects. You can formulate objectives that will only be achieved in the longer-term. For example, reports about environmental problems in which scientific research plays a significant role over a longer period of time.
Step-by-step development of the publicity plan / Media guide

The short-term objective might be to inform and alarm people so as to eventually bring about a desired attitude among the public.

Concrete
You can formulate objectives which are more concrete than the previous example. Perhaps you want to convince pupils and students to take up your subject. For example, to prevent your discipline from being marginalized or that good colleagues can only be found abroad. Another short-term, concrete objective is to interest companies and institutes in a newly-developed method or a prototype with market value. Perhaps your objective is to gain extra financial backing, to increase your budget at the university or to generate funds from private and commercial bodies.

Range
Members of scientific committees and referees who assess your research proposal, read newspapers to keep abreast of scientific developments. If policy officials, consultancies and industrial research managers gain the idea or feeling from reports in the media that your institute carries out quality research, they will be more inclined to take an interest in you.
Rectification

You might be annoyed about inaccuracies, prejudices or incorrect interpretations which you come across in the media or on the street. For example your own reputation of that of your organisation might be at stake. Your objective is then to rectify this via the media.

5.2 Who do you want to reach?

Step 2: Determine the target groups

– Decide beforehand whom you want to inform with your message.

Draw up a list of the target groups who you want to reach. For example, colleagues, students and pupils, patients, policymakers, sponsors and of course the general public. Try to form a picture of each target group. Who are they? Why should they be interested in your research? Do they have a personal interest, such as medical information for sick people, or a collective purpose, such as members of the Wadden Sea Society? You can gain a good picture of your target groups by flicking through the magazines they read. See the next step.
5.3 How can you reach your target groups?

Step 3: Select the media

- Find out which media your target groups gain their information from.
- Determine which perspective these media choose and how the items are structured.
- Find out which journalists are specialists in your area.
- Make a choice.

How can you best reach your chosen target groups? Determine the possible channels per target group. Consider not only the national newspapers and specialist publications, but also popular scientific magazines and books, news magazines, women’s magazines, youth magazines, television, Internet and radio. There are also other methods, such as lectures, open days of exhibitions. If your results are important for a certain region then make sure you inform the local and regional media.

Perspective

For each programme or magazine, determine which perspective the editorial staff concerned choose. Some magazines and supplements mainly focus on news, whereas others focus more on background stories. Select the media appropriate to your objectives. Also choose the type of article or item that fits your target group. Find out who produces these programmes and articles. You can specifically approach these journalists.
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Also ask your press department whom they have good contacts with.
Only enquire about people who are relevant for you.

Tip!

Names and details of programmes, magazines and newspapers can be found in the Handboek van de Nederlandse Pers en Publiciteit [Guide to the Dutch Press and Publicity] (Van Nijgh Periodieken B.V., Schiedam). This three-volume guide can be found in every public relations or communication department as well as in the majority of libraries.
5.4 **Which type of presentation should you choose?**

**Step 4: Determine the type of presentation**

— *Decide which form you want to publish your results in.*

You can present your research results to the public in several ways. For example a press release, a summary of the research, a review article, an interview with the press, an Internet page, a letter to the editor, a poster, or a lecture. A letter to the editor in a newspaper or magazine is, for example, an appropriate method for rectifying inaccuracies or prejudices that you have come across in the media. Such a letter is also a good way to take advantage of current events. A letters page or a correspondence column is usually well read. However, your message still needs to answer the five ‘w questions’: who, what, where, when and why. These questions can be supplemented by questions such as how, how come and for what purpose.

Step 8 of the publicity plan provides more detailed information on writing a press release. Other types of presentation are detailed in chapter 6, *Other routes to the public.*
5.5 The timeframe

Step 5: Make a plan

- Draw up a timetable for your publicity plan.
- Determine the phase in which you will present your research.
- Take deadlines into account.

A publicity plan should have a timetable. Determine when you are going to present your research to the media. If you want to receive attention at the moment you receive a considerable subsidy, then you should first of all discuss your approach for achieving this with the public relations department of your organisation. Journalists are more interested in concrete results than in good intentions. Publishing results halfway through a project is an attractive option for longer projects in particular. Make sure that you give due consideration to your own diary when drawing up the timetable. Ensure that you really are available in the weeks after the press release has been published so that you can answer journalists’ questions.

The deadline

As well as taking your own diary into account, you should also bear the journalist's deadline in mind. He or she needs time to process your information. If you contact a journalist directly, choose a convenient moment.
Try to contact morning newspapers in the morning, because in the afternoon the deadline for the following edition is looming. For the same reason you should phone the evening newspaper after lunch, weekly magazines on Thursday (the majority are published on Wednesday or Thursday) and monthly magazines two weeks before the publication of the issue in which you would like your news to be included.
5.6 What is your message?

**Step 6: Clearly define the content**

- Decide what the most important findings in your research are.
- Establish the main points.
- Formulate the findings as statements and provide arguments.
- Avoid jargon.

Always limit yourself to the main points of your research in your contacts with the media. You should be able to simply state the most important conclusions from your research. If you cannot do that then try to state the research outcomes in a single sentence. When you do this, keep your target group in mind: Which finding is interesting for them? Briefly support your observations with facts, figures and examples.

Only press releases which clearly bring news, stand a chance. Editorial staff do not have enough time to sift through a sea of ‘important facts’ in a press release to reach a newsworthy conclusion. By presenting the conclusions you also steer the report. Formulate the main points without using specialist terms. By doing this you will prevent unnecessary and confusing interpretations.
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Evidence

Make sure you have clear facts and figures with which you can support your conclusions. It is impossible to present all of the measurements. Select the figures which most clearly illustrate your conclusion for a non-specialist. Do not include factors which only support a secondary conclusion in the research.

In general, the results are more relevant for readers than the research method. For the outside world the fact that the measurement was performed using an in vivo 31P-NMR, is less interesting than the result it gave: determining the location of energy supplies in the muscles of a living fish. News items are a less suitable medium for nuances than a scientific article.
5.7 What makes news?

**Step 7: Find the newsworthiness**
- Find a current reason for presenting your results.
- Think about the value of your research for the target group.
- Find out whether your research contradicts the existing scientific order.
- Think about policy implications.

What makes your research newsworthy? Your press release needs a ‘news topic’ – an element that makes your results newsworthy. To find such a topic, think of a reader who is basically interested in your subject but wonders why he should read your article.

It is difficult for outsiders to assess the value of your work, if you only supply scientific results. When you place your scientific conclusion in a broader or societal context, it is easier for an editor to assess its importance. You should also state how your conclusions differ from generally accepted theories of ideas. Feel free to use all your persuasive powers in the press release. However, never start by stating that you have *important* or *interesting* news. The journalist decides whether a press release is important enough to merit his attention.
Current relevance

If your research relates to current events then make full use of this. Issue your press release when important decisions are made in the House of Representatives of the States General (Dutch parliament) or the municipal council, or immediately after a long expected report appears, even if your research is only loosely related to the subject. The interest for the subject is then high and that will draw loosely related but relevant subjects in its wake. The media cluster subjects. News about a study into unemployment in cities will gain more attention, if the monthly unemployment figures have just been published.

Current events can also decrease the interest in your research. There is little space for other subjects soon after a large-scale disaster or during an important football competition. Then it is better to wait a while before sending your press release.

In the news again

For historical research in particular, parallels between the past and present can often be drawn. At a given point in the past decisions were taken on the basis of certain considerations, which had certain consequences. Some discussions keep on cropping up. Those are the suitable moments to make the most of your expertise. In such a situation you can take the initiative. Contact the media to explain what the arguments in the past were and the decisions these led to. Carefully detail the similarities and differences. By doing this you will give historical research a modern-day relevance.
Future

Just like the rest of the public, editors and journalists like trying to predict the future. As an expert you can express your expectations, based on logical reasoning and experiences from the past. Make sure that what you say relates to current events. By sketching a future scenario you can also generate interest for new technological gadgets. Your prototype will then form the start of an exciting development.

Policy implications

Your research could lead to recommendations for a change in policy. Suppose that your research has exposed the strong and weak points of a law or regulation. Both opponents and proponents will be keen to use this information. And of course you can make your own recommendation as well. If you are an authority in your subject area then people will definitely listen to what you have to say.

Against the flow

Your research results clash with the prevailing ideas. The current view will need to be thrown out. In that case your story will probably make a good news topic. You might generate a public debate. The media likes to report on research that delivers surprising results.
5.8 Just write!

Step 8: Write the press release*

- Give the media what they want.
- Stick to the main thread in your story.
- Use clear language, avoid jargon.

Time to put pen to paper. You have determined your objectives and your target groups, you know what the main points of your research are and you have chosen a news topic. Now you just need to use this information to write a lucid press release in which you present your conclusions. However, this is easier said than done. Try to give the media what they want. Tell the news in everyday language. Do not lose track of the main points.

*In this section we concentrate on how to produce a good press release. In chapter 6 we will discuss other types of presentation. We cannot recommend it enough: Contact your public relations department, ask for examples and wherever possible match your press release to these.

The press release

The top of the press release should bear the logo of your organisation or sponsor, the date and the word press release. If applicable state the word ‘embargo’ here.
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The title

The title or headline of your press release is intended to catch the reader’s attention. First of all, make a working title. The title refers to the main line in your story: it states the most exciting event or conclusion. Use the news topic for the headline of your press release. Only write the final headline once you have finished the press release. Coming up with a good headline is difficult, so ask colleagues for their help.

Make titles active by using verbs. For example ‘Fungus bypasses tomato plant’s resistance’. If possible make titles surprising: ‘Round figures on the stock exchange have a psychological effect’. Do not make descriptive headlines, such as ‘Research into the …’ Also the title of your thesis is probably too complex to serve as the headline for a press release. Avoid the use of articles (a/the), parentheses, exclamation marks and question marks.

The lead

The lead or introduction tempts the reader to read the entire press release. A good lead arouses curiosity, evokes surprise and draws the reader into the story. Carefully study a number of leads in the newspaper to see how journalists do this. Complex language and jargon are absolutely forbidden. Write the lead in a casual style and build an element of surprise into it. Unlike in a scientific article you can be up
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front; the lead can immediately announce the newsworthy fact or very briefly describe the problem before providing the newsworthy fact. In the lead you allow the reader to glimpse the applications or implications of the research. And you immediately answer two important ‘w questions’: who and what. The lead also goes some way towards explaining the title. Try to limit the lead to a maximum of 100 words.

**The body**

After the lead, the reader is curious about the interesting story promised. Follow the main point of your story in the body of the press release using the working title and the lead. Stick to the main points. Illustrate your findings with an example. Only state the research method if it is particularly novel and interesting. Editors expect to find the most important information at the start of the press release. If they shorten your press release they start from the bottom upwards. Therefore make sure that your conclusions are at the top. The research method should come at the end of the body of the press release.

**Conclusion**

The conclusion of a press release is mostly abused to provide lots of extra information. This detracts from the main line. Once you have told your story just stop.
Contact

The contact is an essential part of the press release. This states where journalists and editors can obtain extra information. In the reference you state the names of the informants, together with their telephone and fax numbers and an e-mail address. Make sure that the informants are actually available to answer questions in the weeks after press release has been submitted. In the reference you can also state that extra information or images are available on your website. The media really value such a source.

Length

Try to limit the press release to one A4 page, but do not use a small font. Use a second sheet of A4 in exceptional cases and make sure that the sender is clearly stated on this sheet as well.

Language

Jargon is absolutely forbidden. It is a source of misunderstanding and ensures that the reader's attention is lost. Here are a few language tips to make your article easier to read.

- Find simple words for complex terms. Words such as semantics, object, visualisation and perceptibility are not a part of everyday language. A sentence such as ‘The research area concerns the heterogenic catalysed selective reduction of aromatic alkane acids into the corresponding aldehydes’ is too chemical. If in doubt ask somebody outside of your subject area to underline all the words he does not know.
– Avoid ‘camouflaged’ specialist terms: words which sound common enough but for which almost nobody really knows the precise meaning. Examples: tissue-specific, employment market flexibility, pilot production scale, starting qualification, faith networks, nutritional quality, task autonomy, patient career, intertidal zone or loss factor. Rule of thumb: if a word cannot be found in the Oxford English Dictionary, it is jargon.

– Avoid anglicised Dutch which is used for the sake of convenience: ‘deleten, maintainen of targets’.

– Use active, direct language. Prefer the active form to the passive form: Jones investigated Fly behaviour (active) Fly behaviour was investigated by Jones (passive).

– Limit the use of the word ‘one’. Use synonyms or metaphors if you use a word too often.

– Be clear, call a spade a spade.

– Avoid literary sentences for the sake of readability. Maintain a business-like style in the press release.

– Limit the use of anaphors, e.g. that, which, the former, the following. Make sure that your sentences are unambiguous.
5.9 Are you still in the picture?

Step 9: Maintain the interest

– Ask editorial staff for an initial reaction.
– Be available and prepared for questions.

Once you have sent your press release, you do not have to wait to see if something appears in the media. If possible phone the editorial staff for an initial reaction, preferably in consultation with the communication or public relations department of your organisation. Make sure that you, or other informants, are available to answer questions immediately after the press release has been sent. Be prepared for questions requesting more background information or for comments on developments relating to the subject, which might not immediately concern your own research.

Tip!

You can generate extra attention by writing an opinion article in response to possible current developments in your subject.
Press release
1 May 2003

Flies still difficult to catch

Biologist Renate Smallegange will defend her Ph.D. thesis, on how you can best trap houseflies, on 2 May at Groningen University. She used a wind tunnel to investigate how flies are attracted by light and smells such as rotting chicken and damp yeast. The research was financed by Technology Foundation STW.

The biologist who is currently working at Wageningen University, concluded that a flytrap is only effective if the bait for it is carefully chosen. The choice of bait depends on the lighting and smells present in the room where the trap is placed. Flies are always easier to catch during the day, as then they are the most active. Ultraviolet light is the most effective means of attracting flies in a dark room, for example to an electrocution grid, whereas in a lit room smells usually work better. However, smells already present have a limiting effect.

The research is interesting for the food industry because European legislation requires that no flies are present in factories where foodstuffs are produced. Capturing flies in a deadly trap is environmentally friendly and cheap. And as no poison is needed, such traps are safe to use in the food industry.

All houseflies are attracted by smells. However, smells are not effective in the dark. The best scents are chicken dung, slightly rotten pork and chicken, bread soaked in milk or water and a mixture of milk powder, sugar and yeast. These smells attract young and adult flies, male or female, hungry or not.

Unfortunately the majority of scents scarcely work in a room that is already saturated with smells. And that is frequently the case for the food industry. The only smell which still had some effect under such circumstances was rotten chicken on hungry, fertile females.

Ultraviolet light is an effective bait for houseflies which are at least three days old. Yet it scarcely works for younger flies. The method works best in a dark room. Ultraviolet light was found to diminish the luring effect of scents and so it is also suitable for rooms containing many attractive smells. However, making a trap which combines smells with ultraviolet light is not the most obvious solution.

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Catching flies with yeast

The fly does not exist”, says biologist Renate Smallegange. She investigated how houseflies could best be enticed to their death. There is no such thing as the ideal flytrap because no two flies are the same. Flies exhibit different preferences dependent on their sex, age, hunger level and even their origin. Furthermore local circumstances also dictate what flies find attractive.

However Smallegange does have ideas for a multifunctional trap. This can best consist of a UV lamp, as this hoodwinks the houseflies. “The only natural source of UV light is the sun. At various moments the flies have the tendency to fly outside and that is in the direction of the UV light.” Blue, green and white lamps scarcely attract flies. In darker rooms they do have some effect, but in a normally lit environment, flies are not attracted towards these.

Flies often respond to odour. Smallegange discovered that they find the smell of damp yeast particularly attractive. Chicken manure and rotting pork also attract flies. Such ingredients are not really suitable for a flytrap in a room where people come as well. Smallegange, however, has a solution for this. She thinks that much of the attractiveness of these odours is contained in the components 3-methyl-1 H-indole, 1H-indole, butyric acid and dimethyl disulphide. “It might be possible to use these substances at such low concentrations that people no longer experience them as disgusting but the flies nevertheless respond to them.”

Also the flicker frequency of the light is important. People can detect vibrations of up to about 40 to 50 Hz whereas flies can detect these up to 770 Hz. Smallegange expects that male flies, which often chase other flies, should, in theory, be extra sensitive for the frequency of 175 Hz. That is the wing frequency and flies must be alert to this when chasing.

To her surprise flies respond particularly well to very low frequencies of about 10 Hz. The light then has a deterring effect. It can therefore be used to deter flies in rooms where no people work or where people only work occasionally. However, 10 Hz is a very disruptive. It can even induce attacks in epileptic patients. Therefore the only applications that remain are kitchens or the manure disposing parts of stalls.

Smallegange did indeed find an effect of the 175 Hz lamp. Although you do not catch more flies with this, you do catch them more quickly. Male flies in particular respond rapidly to this frequency.

The colour of the traps also plays a role. “For aesthetic reasons the traps are often white whereas flies find black far more attractive. This is because they mainly respond to contrast. They are particularly fond of edges and ridges. When laying eggs they also look for contrast lines. In small gaps their eggs are better protected and remain damp.”

Rinze Benedictus

Hora est!

Who Renate Smallegange
When 2 May 2003
Where University of Groningen
Supervisor Prof. D.G. Starverga
Subject Attractiveness of different light wavelengths, flicker frequencies and odours to the housefly

Simple improvements can be made to the present generation of flytraps. Smeel is and light can help to control flies in an environmentally-friendly, effective and cheap manner. This is what biologist Renate Smallegange concludes in her Ph.D. thesis. Houseflies are not only annoying, but they can also transmit dangerous diseases to humans and animals. Although there is a lot of demand for control, behavioural differences between flies make this particularly difficult.

Smallegange concludes from observations and literature research that simple improvements can be made to the present generation of flytraps, such as UV lamps with electrocution grids. For example, the casings of the lamps are often white, whereas black is a far more attractive colour for flies. The UV lamps currently sold appear to be less attractive for flies than colourless light. Also the mesh used in the grids is not fine enough and therefore the flies can still fly through these. Further it has been proven that a pyramid shape is much more attractive for flies than the elongated shapes which the lamps have at present.

Flies younger than three days old are not in the slightest bit attracted towards light. However adult flies are. Male flies are attracted by a high vibrating frequency of 175 Hz, whereas the females find 40 Hz more attractive. A very low frequency does not attract the flies but scares them away. Therefore lamps of 10 Hz would be a good application. However, this low frequency is not suitable for spaces where people work as the flickering is not only annoying, but in the case of epilepsy patients it can even be dangerous.

These articles are originally in Dutch.
6 Other routes to the public

– Give a public lecture.
– Place your results on a website.
– Organise a press interview or press conference.

Public lecture

In university circles, the public lecture is a tried and tested means of disseminating scientific knowledge. Societies, political parties, and cultural centres are also suitable podiums for popular scientific lectures relevant to a diverse public. Either you or the organising party can announce the lecture via a press release. By providing a foretaste of the lecture, you can arouse people’s curiosity. However, do not disclose too much in the press release. Then you run the risk of people not coming because they feel they know enough already. If you present new results in your lecture, it is handy to provide the media with these beforehand under embargo (until the start of a lecture).
Internet

On your web page, you can present your scientific results to colleagues as well as pupils and students. Journalists also use the Internet a lot. Chapter 9 provides several basic rules for making a good website.

Poster

The chances are that you have some experience in making and presenting a poster. Broadly speaking the rules for making a poster for a wider public are the same as those for scientists: a clear heading, a concise text and several clear illustrations. However, posters aimed at the general public focus more on the results and less on the research methods. You should preferably present your results using graphs and photos. Adjust the colours and the design to the target group. For a professional result it is better to employ a designer. Your name and the logo of your organisation and sponsor should of course be present. It might be a good idea to produce a handout: In its simplest form this could be a reduction of the poster to A4 size. On a more detailed handout you can add a list of references.

Press interview and press conference

For major, groundbreaking or shocking news it is possible to organise a press interview or press conference. This should preferably be done
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by your organisation’s communication department. They will invite journalists from selected media. The attendance of a few journalists can be enough, at least if there are representatives from the national newspapers, the **ANP** (General Dutch Press Agency) and the **GPD** (Associated Press Services, the press office of the Dutch regional newspapers).

The advantage of a press interview or conference is that you can tailor the information to the audience by answering their questions. Prepare your questions and answers carefully together with the communication department!

And further

There are many other possibilities for presenting science to the general public. You can approach a TV or radio talk show yourself, or better still in consultation with the public relations department. Programme editors are always looking for people who can present scientific subjects in a straightforward manner. And do not forget local stations. These are usually well listened to and can be another way of gaining access to the written press.
7 Dealing with journalists

– Make clear agreements with journalists.
– Know what you want to tell.

Scientific journalists specialise in making difficult material understandable. They describe what you do, the research outcomes and the implications of this. You provide them with information they need to do their work well.

You are a specialist in your area and the journalists in theirs. That means they decide what gets published in their magazine and in what form. Their approach to the subject might be different from yours. You have no say in that. But you can exert an influence and provide suggestions.

If you come into contact with journalists it is important to make clear agreements. That prevents disappointment and resentment at a later stage. For example, a journalist will only allow you to read an article before it is published if you explicitly request this. You should also realise that journalists only have limited control over the articles. If the headline of an article deviates from the suggestions you discussed then the chances are that the journalist is not to blame. The editorial staff often change headlines so that these fit on the page. In the case of
newspapers, a journalist cannot always guarantee that the article will be published and if so, when. Sometimes your article will be dropped in favour of more important news.

**Beforehand**

If a journalist approaches you for an interview, then he will state for which medium it is, which perspective his story has, your role in this and when the article will be published or the item will be transmitted. If he forgets to tell you, feel free to specifically enquire about this. This will prevent misunderstandings. Ask in advance whether you may see the story before it is published. That will allow you to check it for factual inaccuracies. The journalist will determine the content and style of the story. However you can make suggestions with respect to this.

**Know your story**

Make sure you know exactly what you want to tell. Think beforehand about the questions that journalists could pose and make sure that you have an answer to all of these questions. It is also helpful if you can think of examples to go with your story. For further tips see chapter 13: *Avoiding common pitfalls*.

**Avoid jargon**

Journalists phone you for information. They are not experts in your subject area. Therefore take time to answer the ‘stupid’ questions. Avoid the jargon, English terms and abbreviations you use in your daily work.
Take time to answer the journalist’s questions. You in turn can pose questions if you do not understand something.

Be alert
Everything that you say during the course of a conversation or an interview can be used by the journalist. This also applies to a candid remark made once the interview has already finished and the journalist has packed up his stuff. You can be sure that such remarks will appear in the article. Therefore make sure you know what you do and do not want to tell.

Between quotes
A frequently heard complaint from politicians is that they have been quoted incorrectly. That is mostly not the case but the politician does this is an attempt to save his own skin. You can prevent this from happening to you by giving clear and unambiguous information. As previously stated, you can agree at the start of the interview that you will check the article before it is published for factual inaccuracies.

Confidential
You might possess ‘sensitive’ information that you need to handle carefully. You wish to inform the reader or listener of the facts but without your name being stated. In such cases you can supply the journalist with information in confidence – off the record. State clearly
that you do not wish to be cited as the source. Journalists will respect that. It is in their interest to have a valuable informant. Also make sure you literally give your information off the record, i.e. once the journalist has switched off his tape recorder. This is how you can provide important background information, such as a secret report.

However, use this method sparingly!

Limit yourself to your research. ‘Sensitive’ information about your organisation is usually of little interest to journalists. Thorny issues within the university or faculty board are usually less interesting for the outside world. However, should a journalist pose questions about internal issues within the organisation where you are or were a researcher, refer him to the official spokesperson.
8 When the phone rings

If the journalist takes the initiative

- Realise that attention from the media is always appropriate.
- Do not be overwhelmed; if needs be phone back.

Sometimes a journalist will take the initiative and call you unexpectedly for an explanation or a reaction. You might then feel overwhelmed at first: After all you are not as well prepared as if you had sought the contact yourself. See the ‘rules’ in chapter 13 as well.

Interest from the media is a sign of confidence in your expertise. Journalists often find you because one of your colleagues has referred them to you. Take advantage of this. Sometimes an article in the newspaper or a magazine can lead to further media interest, for example on radio and television. In the event of unplanned media interest, remember the steps in the publicity plan detailed in chapter 4. Make sure that you can clearly state the main points of your research.

The more often you give an interview, the easier it will get. You can prepare for media interest by practising in a trusted environment. As well as the content of your research, your practice interview could focus on the future of your research or your motivation for doing it. By talking
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to lay people about your work, you will learn to adjust your language and to estimate your discussion partner’s level of knowledge. If needs be, ask a press officer from your organisation for advice or take a course in media presentation skills.

Tips for when a journalist phones you

– Note the name of the journalist and the medium he works for. Ask about the status of the interview; what will the journalist do with the information and will the conversation be recorded? Do not respond immediately if you expect problems, but phone back once you have discussed the matter with a colleague or your public relations department.

– Do not be afraid to ask a journalist about his background knowledge of your subject area. That will enable you to match the explanation and your language to the level of the journalist.

– If you do not possess the correct data then refer the journalist to a colleague, together with a telephone number.

– If the phone call comes at an inconvenient moment, promise to phone back later or make an appointment for an interview. You can also promise to send the information requested. Ask about the deadline if you need to look up the answer. Also make sure you phone back if you cannot find the answer so that the journalist knows he needs to look further. If the journalist is only phoning for short factual information then it is best to deal with the call straightaway.
When the phone rings / Media guide

- If the journalist confronts you with a cliché statement which always keeps popping up in your subject area then respond with a qualifying answer. Ask yourself whether this is based on prejudices, exaggerations or unfounded anxiety. For example, the statement that research into space travel is a waste of money.

- The tips from chapter 13 also apply to an unexpected interview. Always be aware that your words will soon be in print. Do not allow yourself to be tempted into criticising colleagues, managers of politicians in a lively discussion with an interested journalist. You cannot retract your words.
9 Your own website

- Make a clickable contents page.
- Write clearly and concisely.
- Begin with the news.
- A start page should be no more than 200 words in length.
- Divide the text into paragraphs and use subheadings.
- Use pictures and animations sparingly; these slow down the site.

Pupils, students, policymakers and journalists surf the web on a daily basis looking for information. As well as being a calling card for your research, a website allows you to present exactly what you want. From topical items to background information.

Concise

Keep your text concise, preferably no bigger than a window. In the text you can place links to more information in a deeper layer. Check the websites of various organisations to find attractive examples.

Clear structure

An attractive and clear structure is essential for a successful site. The visitor wants to know where he is and where he can find information quickly, using as few clicks as possible.
The text is usually the most important source of information for the visitor. Therefore use sounds, pictures and animations sparingly. Although they attract a lot of attention they slow down your site considerably. Make a clear distinction on your site between the information which is only relevant for colleagues and the parts of your site that are also suitable for a wider audience.

Making a good and, in particular, an accessible site, is a professional job. If possible ask an expert to help you set up your site.

**Rules of thumb**

- Adopt a clear navigation structure, so that the visitor always knows where he is.
- Do not make the structure more than three layers (three clicks) deep.
- Cross-link pages across the structure of the site if there is a clear link between them.
- Choose the keywords carefully so that the main search engines know to find your page.
- Update your site regularly and remove outdated information.
- Do not place all of your information on the site. Select appropriate information for your target audience.

10 Giving popular talks

- *Take the public seriously.*
- *Plan your speech.*

Speaking to non-specialists about science is both enjoyable and inspiring. You have direct contact with the public and can see how the information is received. Questions and remarks from the public can provide you with a fresh look at your research. Yet explaining terms and processes which are completely obvious to you can be particularly difficult. Here are a number of suggestions about how to approach a lecture for a general public.

**Beforehand**

Familiarise yourself with the public beforehand. What is the background of your audience and what do they expect from you? When preparing a lecture, ask yourself the questions listed in the publicity plan steps in chapter 4. Ask yourself the following questions as well. What is the educational level of the audience? What are they interested in? What are the main points?

In addition to this it is important to know how the presentation will unfold. What does the room look like? Where can you stand or sit during the lecture? Have other speakers been invited and do you have to take
into account what they will say? What equipment is present? You will not be the first person to prepare a PowerPoint presentation only to find out that no projector is available.

A lecture is a highly suitable vehicle for generating interest in your subject, for influencing the opinion or behaviour of the listeners or stimulating a discussion about a subject. It is less appropriate for presenting a lot of complex information, especially if you want your public to remember the content. Written text or exhibitions are better media for such purposes.

**Structure**

A clear structure is even more important for a lecture than for a text, because the listener cannot quickly flip back a few pages if he loses the thread. A speech plan will give you a clear line during your lecture. Such a crib sheet is far more effective than a speech written out in full. A speech read aloud sounds boring. Moreover it limits the possibilities to respond to reactions from the public. A speech plan contains the main line of your story: it gives a schematic overview of your lecture, with key words under each section.

A lecture consists of an introduction, a middle and an end or conclusion, usually followed by questions or a discussion.
The introduction is intended to provide a brief overview of your story and elicit some questions. It grabs the listener’s attention. The middle part is the essence of your story: In this you answer the questions raised in the introduction. In the closing part you draw your conclusions and complete your story. In the last part you may not broach any new subjects. Make sure that your presentation does not run over and that sufficient time is left for questions from the audience. Make sure that you do not lose the thread of your story in the event of intervening questions. Whatever your approach, try to give as much consideration as possible to the public’s level of interest. The public’s concentration is greatest during the first twenty minutes and decreases rapidly thereafter: Take this into account when making your preparations.

Language
A lecture is not an article: Use short sentences and avoid complex metaphors and jargon. Adjust your language to the target group. Think in advance about terms that might cause problems. Practise your lecture in front of family members of friends who are not at home in the subject.

Images and sound
Audiovisual aids can be used to liven up your presentation or to clarify things, for example, a blackboard, video clips, slides, overhead sheets or a computer presentation (for example, PowerPoint). Use these sparingly so that your message is not lost in a sea of images and sounds.
Practise using the equipment before the lecture, so that you do not have to look for the correct buttons during the presentation. In the speech plan you can note the number of the sheet or the counter position of the video recorder. When using audiovisual material, make sure that you keep on facing the public.

Attention

The presentation can start. In addition to audibility, body language is also very important. Gestures can support a text. People who naturally use a lot of gestures will also use their hands a lot during a presentation. That facilitates a relaxed presentation. However excessive gesturing gives a nervous impression. If you use your hands too much it might help to hold something. That suppresses spontaneous gestures. Practice in front of the mirror. Making eye contact with the public is an effective means of involving them in the story. In your mind, divide the room into three sections and look at each in turn. This will prevent you from looking at the same person too frequently or for too long, thereby giving the rest of the audience the feeling that they are excluded.

Take your public seriously. Comments such as ‘that is too difficult to explain’ demotivate your listeners. This comment is more likely to give the impression that you find it difficult to explain. Hopefully the last tip goes without saying: practice makes perfect. Regular practice will make you a better speaker.
11 Listening time

When you are on the radio
- Relax.
- Be brief but speak in complete sentences.
- Avoid jargon.
- Stay polite.

Up until now we have mainly spoken about newspapers and magazines. Scientific news is often also welcome on radio and television. Due to the technique, an interview for radio or television is different from an interview with a journalist from the written press. There are live interviews and recorded interviews. The difference is marginal. In both cases it mostly concerns a broadcast of several minutes. Try to relax before the interview. Do not run up the stairs to get to the interviewer quickly. The results of that can be heard during an interview. Also relax mentally. Breathe deeply. Quietly tell your story and use words that are understood.

Main point
The interview has finished before you realise it: Therefore concentrate on the main point of your research. Practise this at home. Be brief and to the point. Specialist terms are absolutely forbidden in radio programmes. The listener must be able to understand you immediately.
There is even less space for nuances than in the newspaper. Therefore decide exactly what you want to say beforehand, but do not rehearse your lines. The listener hears that and it will detract from the spontaneity. Repeat the question or incorporate the question in your answer. Illustrate the main point with a short example. Speak clearly and not too quickly. If several people are being interviewed at once then do not speak out of turn. The interviewer will invite you to speak. If you have authentic research sounds, such as fragments from a foreign language, take those with you and discuss these beforehand with the programme makers.

A live broadcast cannot be repeated. Everything you say is transmitted immediately. Ask how much time you have to speak. At most you can fit 100 words into a single minute.

**Prepare yourself**

Before a radio interview, enquire about the programme concerned and the listeners you will be speaking to. Match your answers to this. Ask in advance about the type of questions you can expect. Usually the interview starts with factual questions and then shifts to opinions about these.

Do not get into a conflict with the interviewer: that is usually an admission of weakness. The listener nearly always chooses the reporter’s side, as he is only doing his work. Furthermore the interviewer has the
last word. Instead give a clear account with strong arguments. Use facts and figures to support your opinion.

Types and sizes of interviews

– The reporter wants to visit you. Ask him whether he would like a quiet environment.

– Telephone interview: You can respond to this immediately. If the call comes at an inconvenient moment, say that you will phone back in ten minutes. Use the time to prepare yourself.

– Studio interview: Find out whether there are other guests. Speak to the interviewer, not to the microphone. Let other speakers have their say. If you respond to what another speaker has said then you should first of all state the points you agree with. You can then move onto the differences or contradictions. When doing this do not forget your main point.

– Phone-in interview: You will wear a telephone headset that will allow you to enter into a conversation with listeners who call. Always remember to be polite even if you are unjustly criticised. Do not patronise and when responding you should again state the points you agree with first. Then you can talk about the differences.
12 Viewing time

On television

- Orientate yourself, watch the programme.
- Give a good impression.
- Tape the broadcast.

The same guidelines apply for television as for radio. However, now the picture is also important. Here are a few rules of thumb.

Preparation

Watch the programme. That will give you an idea about its design. Is it a spontaneous program such as a talk show, or is it loaded with impressions such as in a documentary? Measure how long the guests are given to talk. Also ask about the public for whom the programme is intended. Ask yourself whether you wish to be on the programme and whether you are the appropriate person. If possible take something with you to show. Ask the programme makers what they want to know and determine what you want to say.

Appearance

Viewers will see you before they hear you. You will make a good first impression if you are properly dressed. Do not dress too formally. Fine stripes of patterns in your clothing will give rise to a restless television picture.
Take some extra clothing to the studio so that you can get changed if your clothing disrupts the picture.

In the studio
Allow make-up to be applied to your face if necessary. This will prevent your nose from glistening on the television or you having a pale appearance. Ask for a glass of water to moisten your voice. Be aware of the floor manager or director who indicate when the interview starts.

The interview
The interview in front of the camera is just like a normal interview. Speak the language of your public, be clear and concise. Back up your points. Do not state too many figures. The spoken word is too quick for this. Instead try to use examples from everyday life. Do not give just yes or no answers unless the interviewer clearly asks for these. Make sure you finish your sentences.

Usually the interview is just part of the programme. And in this you are a source of information. You should also act as such: Speak in a business-like manner and do not be too emotional or too polite.

Look at the interviewer during the interview. Ignore the camera. You are not a newsreader, therefore you do not have to address yourself to the viewers. Sit up straight and express confidence by looking reasonably happy. Your charisma is determined more by how you say something and how you look than by the content of your words.
13 Avoiding common pitfalls

- Be aware of the sensitivity of a subject.
- Do not respond to insinuations or provocative questions.
- Stick to your expertise: do not give rash comments about side issues.

Many scientists are somewhat cautious about their contacts with the press. Usually their preconceptions are unjustified and everything works out as desired. Yet despite this there are some common pitfalls. Some tips.

Taboo subjects

Research about sex, addiction, euthanasia, starvation, the evolution theory or diseases such as AIDS often comes up against taboos. Bear these sensitivities in mind if you have contact with the press. However do not duck the issue. Emphasise that this is serious research that can have consequences for society. Use your experience to develop a strategy.

Hidden meanings

Do not allow yourself to be tempted by insinuating or provocative questions or remarks. If you recognise such a question do not respond to it. Politicians also never respond to ‘what if’ questions during interviews. State that the research or your findings deserve serious consideration.
Wasted money
A lot of research does not have an immediate application in society. Journalists often ask about the usefulness of the millions of euros invested in fundamental research. In such cases explain the importance of the research for science. And go a step further and explain the merits of science in the longer-term. Give examples of this.

Indirect comments
Stick to your expertise: Do not make any comments about issues in which you are not an expert. Do not be tempted to incidentally give your view about current issues or scientific subjects outside of your specialist area. Think in advance about the possible consequences of the results from your research: journalists regularly pose this question.

Know yourself
Takes steps to protect yourself if you receive too much media attention. Can you cope with this? Are you getting your message across? If needs be allow a trusted and experienced person to support and advise you.
14 When things go wrong

Something still goes wrong

– Make a careful analysis.
– Weigh up the pros and cons of your reaction.

Despite your best efforts, something still went wrong: In your opinion the journalist has not handled your research data correctly. What do you do then?

First of all, try to form a picture of where it has gone wrong. Is it a question of interpretation or is it about factual inaccuracies? How important is the inaccuracy? What consequences will this have? There are then two options. You can make a complaint or you can leave things as they are. Let us start with this last option first. It is seriously worth considering doing nothing. That can save you from a lot of hassle: you probably have better things to do with your time. It is more important that you do not damage the relationship with the editor or journalist. In such a case you can mention your dissatisfaction about these subtleties during the course of the following contact. Or you can also pick up the phone straightaway or write a letter. Remember that the final form of the article is often determined by other editors and not the one you had contact with. For example, an editor-in-chief often changes the headline
of an article to make it fit in. You can demand a rectification but the media are not enthusiastic about that. You can also propose to the editorial staff to incorporate your correction into new or different data from your research in a following contribution.

If you are foaming with anger, do not phone the editorial staff straightaway. Calm down first of all and discuss an adequate response with your public relations department. Always remember that in the event of mistakes, the majority of readers, listeners or viewers take the information in far more superficially than you as a person who is directly involved. Therefore the consequences of a mistake are usually not that great.
15 Assistance

The role of the public relations department

- The public relations officials of your organisation are experts: ask them for help and advice.
- Get major public activities placed in the diaries of magazines and on Internet sites.
- Keep your public relations department informed about your publicity plans.

Information to the media consists of two parts: the scientific information and the form. As a scientific researcher you are always responsible for the content of the article. The information must be scientifically correct. The same requirements apply as for a thesis or a scientific article. If you send a press release yourself you are also responsible for its packaging: the headline of the press release, the lead, the choice of words and the postage stamp. The form of your press release can best be left to the public relations department of your organisation or your sponsor. The public relations officials are experts. They have the necessary contacts and experience for a successful publicity campaign. Generating publicity is a profession in its own right. Contact your public relations department well in advance.
The Agenda van Nederland (www.agendavannederland.nl) lists symposia, lectures, congresses, open days and other events in the areas of science and technology. These activities are open to interested persons and the media. NWO publishes the newsletter ResearchReports each month, in which researchers publish their findings, conclusions, recommendations and other newsworthy facts. The ResearchReports are open to submissions from researchers whose research has been supported by an NWO subsidy. It is published in English and Dutch. If your press release is published in ResearchReports, you have the advantage of appearing in a well-known medium that the media value.

In your contacts with the press and in your press releases, always state the scientific organisation you work for or who funds you. That increases your reliability in the eyes of the media. Furthermore, it also increases the reputation of your research institute or sponsor.
16 Language tips

For a correct spelling consult the ## or a spell checker in your word processor. Various guides can be consulted such as ## for questions about style, language and punctuation. A small selection from these works now follows.

Empty words

Many words can be scrapped without any consequence. Examples: at the moment, in the present situation, to a considerable extent, the necessary, possible, total, costs aspect, working atmosphere, so, also, anyway, in fact, in principle, indeed, than all, various, worse, very.

Empty sentences

Sentences which do not add anything can best be omitted. Examples: This research has yielded interesting conclusions. The choice of applications is guided by an impetus towards the integration of knowledge. At present several important developments are under way in which the processed data from the research will be re-examined in the new situation. It is however assumed that the position which they adopt could play a role in the surrounding context. The organisation is striving towards an effective and efficient use of the financial resources before realising its scientific and research policy.
Anglicisms

It is a misunderstanding to assume that your message can be better expressed in English than Dutch. Therefore always try to find a Dutch equivalent for your English specialist terms. Composite words which are written as two separate words in English are usually written as one word in Dutch. For example, news agency is ‘nieuwsagentschap’ or ‘persagentschap’ in Dutch. Take care with words which seem similar but do not have the same meaning. In English decade means 10 years; in Dutch a decade lasts just 10 days.
17 Communication tips

1. Talking with the press is fundamentally different from a conversation with academics. Prepare yourself for this.

2. Try to picture the people or the public to whom you are speaking.

3. Limit yourself to the main points. You should preferably choose one theme.

4. Determine which information is important for the public.

5. Supply information that is unambiguous and comprehensible.

6. Make clear agreements with a journalist.

7. Maintain a positive relationship with the journalist. Keep him informed and allow yourself to be informed about your chances.

8. Make sure you benefit from existing, and well-known public relations channels. Ask your public relations department for help and advice.

9. You are responsible for the content of your press releases to the media.

10. Journalists and editors determine the style and perspective of their stories. However you can check for factual inaccuracies.