

# Speaking with and writing for media

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# Overview

- Media and its changing landscape
- Why share your research?
- Supports available
- Ways to tell your story
- Strategic timing
- Getting to the root of your message
- How to prepare your message
- Plain language principles
- Elements of a successful story
- Interview tips
- Troubleshooting

# Who are 'the media?'

Journalists work for a variety of media outlets locally, nationally and internationally:

- Print publications
- Broadcast television
- Web publications
- Radio stations



# How we access and consume news has changed

- New technologies and distribution methods continue to evolve the way content is accessed.
- The internet and social media have created instant access and demand.
- Readers want news at their fingertips, day and night.
- These changes have put a strain on traditional media outlets.

# Print media in Niagara

2002

- 3 Dailies
- 9 Weeklies
- 0 Online-only Pubs
- 5 Companies
- 50+ Reporters
- 20+ Editors

2022

- 3 Dailies
- 3 Weeklies
- 5 Online-only Pubs
- 1 Main Company
- 9 Reporters
- 4 Editors

# The bad news

- Fewer stories being written.
- Fewer requests for interviews with experts.
- Fewer journalists showing up at university events.
- Less experienced journalists may have difficulty understanding complex research.

# The good news

- More need to fill space in newspapers, online.
- More willingness to use copy, photos and video from universities.
- Stronger relationships with remaining journalists.
- More opportunity to tell stories in new and interesting ways.

While the media landscape continues to evolve, the role of media remains the same: to help people become educated and better informed about issues that matter — and your work matters!

# Why share your expertise?

- More opportunities for funding and partnerships.
- More chances to share why your research matters to the world.
- Position yourself as an expert in your field.
- Raise your profile as a researcher within your university.



# Remember: you're not alone

- All post-secondary institutions (and many public and private organizations) have communications professionals who are there to help tell your story.
- Resources vary based on the institution, but teams often provide support with writing, photography, video, media outreach and social media promotion.
- Take advantage of their industry knowledge and connections – that's what they're there for.

# When to tell your research story

- When your research gets funded.
- As you're looking for research participants.
- Partway through a long project providing an update.
- After your research is published.
- At a time when your work is timely.

# When to tell your research story

- Being strategic with timing can make a big difference.
- Align a story's release with relevant external events, headline news or even certain holidays to have the greatest impact.
- Create a plan with your university's communications professionals.

# Ways to tell your story

- Press releases
- News story on university website
- Opinion columns
- Videos
- Social media content
- Lab tours or other events for media
- Photography

28 January 2022  
R0008  
Brock University – Marketing and Communications

### Winter Olympics in Beijing raise many questions

From China's human rights issues to the International Olympic Committee's claim of gender equity to sponsors walking the fine line of negative publicity, the 2022 Winter Olympics, which start next week in Beijing are loaded with complex issues overshadowing the quest for gold medals and world records.

Less than seven months since the rescheduled 2020 Summer Olympics wrapped up in Tokyo, the first competitions of the 2022 Winter Olympics will begin on Wednesday, Feb. 2, followed by the opening ceremony on Friday, Feb. 4.

Brock University has numerous experts available to speak with the media in the lead-up to, and during, the Olympic and Paralympic Games on a variety of subjects:

#### **Sports marketing**

With the controversy surrounding these Games, **Brock University Assistant Professor of Sport Management Michael Naraine** says Canadian brands will need to be careful in how they roll out their Olympic advertisements.

"There is a very real need for advertisers in Canada to focus on Canadian athletes doing amazing things and what it means to be Canadian," he says. "Expect to see ads that disassociate from anything to do with China and COVID and instead focus on promoting themes such as women's empowerment, diversity and inclusivity."

Naraine says there are risks that come with advertising during a controversial and uncertain Games, but also potential rewards.

"The long-term value of being an Olympic sponsor is immense in terms of getting into the minds and wallets of young people and their parents," he says. "Brands are able to create an ecosystem of proliferated consumption."

#### **Gender equity**

**Brock University Assistant Professor of Sport Management Michele Donnelly** says the Winter Olympics are "significantly less equal than the Summer Games, especially when you take into account uniform differences."

"There are more mixed-gender sports being praised as contributing to gender equality at Beijing 2022, even though there is no evidence to support the claim," she says.

CONTRIBUTORS OPINION

## In sport sanctions, the ends justify the means

History shows these kinds of measures can be effective if the public sticks with them for a long period of time, Taylor McKee writes.

By Taylor McKee  
Fri., March 11, 2022 | 3 min. read



World sport organizations have been signalling their intent to stand with Ukraine in recent days, hoping the exclusion of Russian teams and players will pressure Vladimir Putin into ending his invasion efforts. While these moves are commendable gestures, nothing short of military intervention is likely to accomplish this in the near future.

Should the situation drag on, could exclusion from the world sporting community be successfully used to convince Russia to reverse course? It could — if the world can live without watching some of its favourite athletes for what might be a very long time.

I recently asked some of my students if they were in favour of excluding Russian athletes from the Paralympics. About 70 per cent of their hands went up. I then asked if the NHL should send Russian-born players home. Only a few hands were raised. It seems the students, like many of us, are more concerned about athletes on their favourite hockey teams. Knowing this is key to understanding how sport boycotts — any boycotts, really — can be effective: they must be kept up, even when they become inconvenient or detrimental to us.

Sport sanctions and boycotts are inherently unfair. It is unjust that individuals should be punished for the actions of their government. But painful though they may be, history shows these kinds of measures can be effective if the public sticks with them for a long period of time. The ends often justify the means.

A key part of the campaign to end apartheid in South Africa, for instance, was the exclusion of South African athletes and teams from global competition, and the boycotting of any teams that played against South Africa. The goal of these sanctions was total sporting isolation.

# THE CONVERSATION

<https://theconversation.com/ca>

- An independent source of news and views, from the academic and research community, delivered direct to the public
- Aims to allow for better understanding of current affairs and complex issues
- An indispensable media resource: providing free content, ideas and talent to follow up for press, web, radio or TV

# Fostering a fear-based environment: Coach behaviour needs to change in high-performance sport

Published: August 28, 2022 8:33am EDT

Athlete stories should prompt a shift in coach behaviour that encourages clarity and resets expectations and boundaries. (Shutterstock)

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Listen To The Article

AD AURIS

Sport organizations have repeatedly come under fire with frequent allegations of toxic culture. With each news article, comes a push to change the culture of sport, yet culture change is difficult and ripe with push back.

This leaves sport practitioners with the question, where do we start? Our answer: The coach.

## Authors



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# FIFA World Cup: With climate change, will there still be a soccer World Cup in 2100?

Published: November 17, 2022 4:07pm EST

The 2022 FIFA World Cup, beginning on Nov. 20, will be held in Qatar. Shutterstock

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Many major sports gatherings have been rocked by extreme weather events in recent years. A typhoon forced the postponement of several matches during the World Cup in Qatar. Extreme weather became unbreathable during the 2020 Tokyo Olympics due to fires. The Olympic Marathon was postponed due to oppressive heat in Tokyo. And the situation for the future is uncertain.

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## Disclosure statement

# To clean up Hockey Canada, financial transparency is a must

Published: November 8, 2022 4:23pm EST

A Hockey Canada document is reviewed by a member of Parliament during a House of Commons Committee on Canadian Heritage looking into safe sport in Canada on Parliament Hill in Ottawa on Oct. 4, 2022. THE CANADIAN PRESS/Sean Kilpatrick

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There is a transparency issue at the root of the Hockey Canada scandal. By now, most Canadians are well aware of how the organization used funds to cover up allegations of sexual misconduct. But Hockey Canada didn't just betray the trust of the public — it also betrayed its own stakeholders.

When Hockey Canada opted to not inform funders, sponsors, members, players and parents about how it used its funds, it violated the trust of its stakeholders. This violation has far reaching implications about financial transparency — not only for Hockey Canada, but for the nonprofit sector as a whole.

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# **Preparing your message: Know yourself**

What is your research/work about?

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Why are you doing it?

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What would you like to see occur as a result of your research/work?

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# **Preparing your message: Know your audience**

# Group work – Step 1

The group picks one of the following three options. Group members do the tasks individually and discuss after.

Option 1. Come up with a story idea in your field of research and imagine you're pitching this idea to a group of your peers, perhaps for a specialized journal. Write a three to five-sentence description of your research and story idea, keeping in mind that you want to make a good impression on your advisor and fellow academics (so make sure to use lots of specialist language and jargon!).

Option 2. Go to an academic journal you're most familiar with and select an abstract with heavy specialist language that you understand but that most or all of the other members of your group do not.

Option 3. Download and read as much of this journal article as possible:  
<https://journals.humankinetics.com/view/journals/ssj/aop/article-10.1123-ssj.2022-0095/article-10.1123-ssj.2022-0095.xml?content=abstract>

# Group work – Step 2

Option 1: Select one person to read their story idea out loud. The group members who are NOT in the immediate field and/or are unfamiliar with the specific jargon and specialist language used will now write 3-5 sentences of what you think the presenter was trying to say. Don't ask the presenter to explain or don't google – if you're unsure, just take your best guess.

Option 2: Select one person to read the journal abstract out loud. The group members who are NOT in the immediate field and/or are unfamiliar with the specific jargon and specialist language used will now write 3-5 sentences of what you think the presenter was trying to say. Don't ask the presenter to explain or don't google – if you're unsure, just take your best guess.

Option 3: Download and read as much of this CTV News article as possible: <https://www.ctvnews.ca/sports/qatar-s-decision-to-host-world-cup-denounced-as-sportswashing-by-skeptics-1.6155311>

# Group work – Step 3

In Options 1 and 2, group members who tried to interpret the jargon-filled story ideas and journal abstracts can share what they wrote and compare notes with the person who read the story ideas or journal abstract. Option 3 members can share their thoughts on the readability of the journal article versus the CTV news article.

# Obstacles to using Plain Language

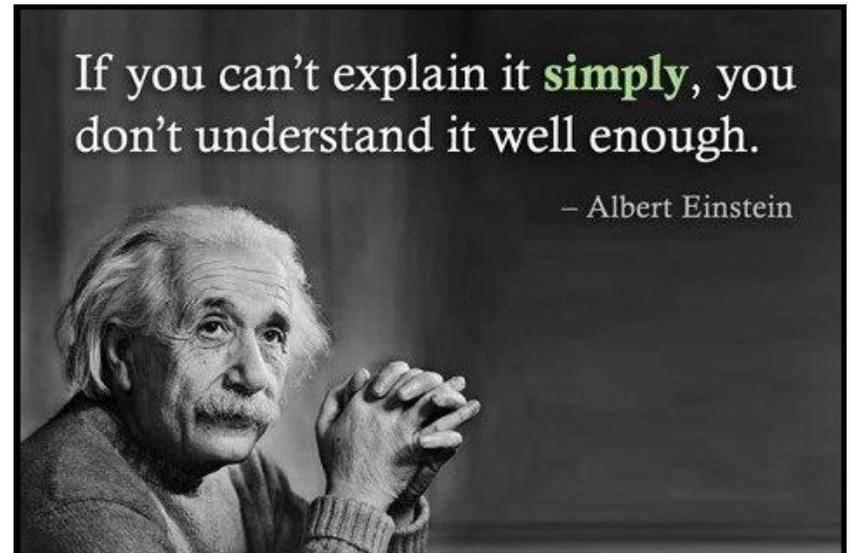
- \* Thinking of our immediate peers versus a general audience
- \* Fear of being inaccurate and/or not sounding like an “expert”
  - \* Plain language is nice but not a must
  - \* We think our language is already plain
    - \* Overwhelm: where do I start?

# Plain language

Plain language (also called Plain English) is communication your audience can understand the first time they read or hear it. Written material is in plain language if your audience can:

- Find what they need to know
- Understand what they need to know
- Use this information to meet their needs

Source: <http://www.plainlanguage.gov/whatisPL/>



# Do's and Don'ts of Plain Language

- Don't use jargon or highly specialized language
- Do explain technical terms and acronyms right away if you can't avoid using them
- Do write or speak at a level of middle-school or high-school level education depending on your audience
- Do use common, everyday words and expressions (ex. “cognitive development” vs. “how children think, explore and figure things out”)
- Don't use abstract nouns (“The implementation of the method has been done by a team,” versus, “A team has implemented the method.”)
- Don't use a passive voice (This matter will be considered by us shortly, : versus “We will consider this matter shortly.”)
- Do paint a picture with your words

**Tone:** communicate in a formal yet conversational style

**Word choice:** use the simplest word/expression that conveys your meaning

Common, everyday words and expressions:

cognition = thinking

disseminate = give, issue, send, distribute

expeditious = fast, quick

**Jargon:** avoid jargon and abbreviations unless your reader is familiar with it, and if they are not, explain technical terms. (Jargon are terms that are specific to particular disciplines, industries)

Even research terms can be simplified!:

longitudinal study = long-term study; study over time

principal investigator = lead researcher; head of research project

pedagogy = teaching method; education

**SMIT = Single Most Important Thing**

**BLAM = Bottom Line Actionable Messages**

# Connecting with your audience



Contribute new information, knowledge or insights to society

Give a new perspective to issues and debates currently in the public discourse

Encourage or motivate behaviour change

Seek research participants or partners

# What makes research stories work?

**Timely:** builds on something that is happening in the news or what is coming up

**Personal:** “science that you can use”

**Surprising:** counter-intuitive; makes us curious

**Crucial:** speaks to people’s immediate concerns

**Local:** Speaks to audiences in different parts of the country

**Controversial:** not just situations, but clash of ideas or information

**A new view on an existing problem:** continues the conversation

Source: Simona Choise, *The Globe and Mail*

*Mail*

## Make it 'real people' meaningful!

A CBC producer panel agreed that:

Real people is the #1 key to getting these stories broadcast, we really, really need real people – top three bullet points that are valuable about the study that should make you exclaim: **1. Wow that's interesting 2. WOW that's new 3. WOW That's something I never heard of.**

OK, now go back to your list of why the typical reader should care about your story idea and pick one. Consider how you may work that reason into your pitch and adjust the message. Now shorten your story idea 'pitch' to just 1-2 sentences.

# Summary

- Stop and think before you start writing or being interviewed. Make a note of the points you want to make in a logical order.
- Prefer short words. Long words will not impress your readers and listeners.
- Use everyday English whenever possible. Avoid jargon and legalistic words, and always explain any technical terms you have to use.
- Keep your sentence length down to an average of 15 to 20 words. Try to stick to one main idea in a sentence.
- Use active verbs as much as possible. Say 'we will do it' rather than 'it will be done by us.'
- Be concise.
- Imagine you are talking to your reader. Write or speak sincerely, personally, in a style that is suitable and with the right tone of voice.
- And always check that your writing is clear, helpful, human and polite.

*(taken from: How to Write in Plain English)*

# **Delivering the Message: The Interview**

# What is the purpose of a journalist conducting an interview?

Why Interview Anyone At All? By Joe Bunting:

<http://thewritepractice.com/why-interview-anyone-at-all/>

## 1. To get the facts

- 4Ws and H: who, what, why, when and how (most common in news stories)
- details about your research
- general information about the subject matter
- “the article develops as the facts are revealed”

## 2. To get the personality

- the ‘discovery’ interview: who is the person behind the research/event/issue
- how a person interacts with the world and how the world interacts with them
- putting a face to the story

## 3. Promotion

- journalist believes in the work, thinks its important for the audience to know
- “to legitimize my content by attracting fans of those interviewees”  
*(blogger Jeff Goins)*

## 4. To add perspective

- ‘first-hand’ account
- deeper understanding of the research/situation/issue

## 5. Objectivity

- every ‘source’ has a particular ‘piece of the pie’ (ie. information/experience/opinion) to contribute to the issue; audience gets a balanced view when all these are put together
- journalists can’t just report what they think; they need outside input

## 6. Because your audience would love it

- “in the end, you interview to give your audience something you couldn’t give them on your own”
- “What does your audience want? The facts? The personality? Do they want a bigger perspective or objectivity? Or to be introduced to the people whose work you [journalist] believe in? As you build your audience and get to know them, you’ll get a sense of why they would want to interview others.”

# Preparing for the spotlight

- Put your phone on silent.
- Hang a 'Do Not Disturb' sign on the door.
- Have a look in the mirror.
- Keep your background (Zoom or otherwise) clear of anything you don't want the public to see.

# Learn from Professor Robert Kelly



# Preparing for the spotlight

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# Acing the interview

- Introduce yourself and provide your name pronunciation, so they don't take a guess.
- Avoid reading from notes.
- Ask if the segment is live or recorded, so you know if you can start an answer again.
- Answer succinctly and let them ask a follow-up. Cover one point at a time.
- Don't rush to fill in the silence.
- Speak with confidence — you are the expert!

# Not smooth sailing?

- If they ask you something you're not comfortable answering – say so.
- Don't be afraid to direct answers back to issues you're comfortable with.
- If it's not live and you don't like the way you answered a question, ask if you can give it another shot.
- Don't ask to go 'off the record.'

# Post-interview

- Reach out to the reporter to say thank you and offer further assistance.
- Do not ask to see the story before it runs.
- If there's an issue with the story, contact your communications team.
- If you'd prefer to go it alone, politely let the reporter know and ask for a correction.



**Remember:  
Your institution's  
communications team is  
there to help.**

# Questions?

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