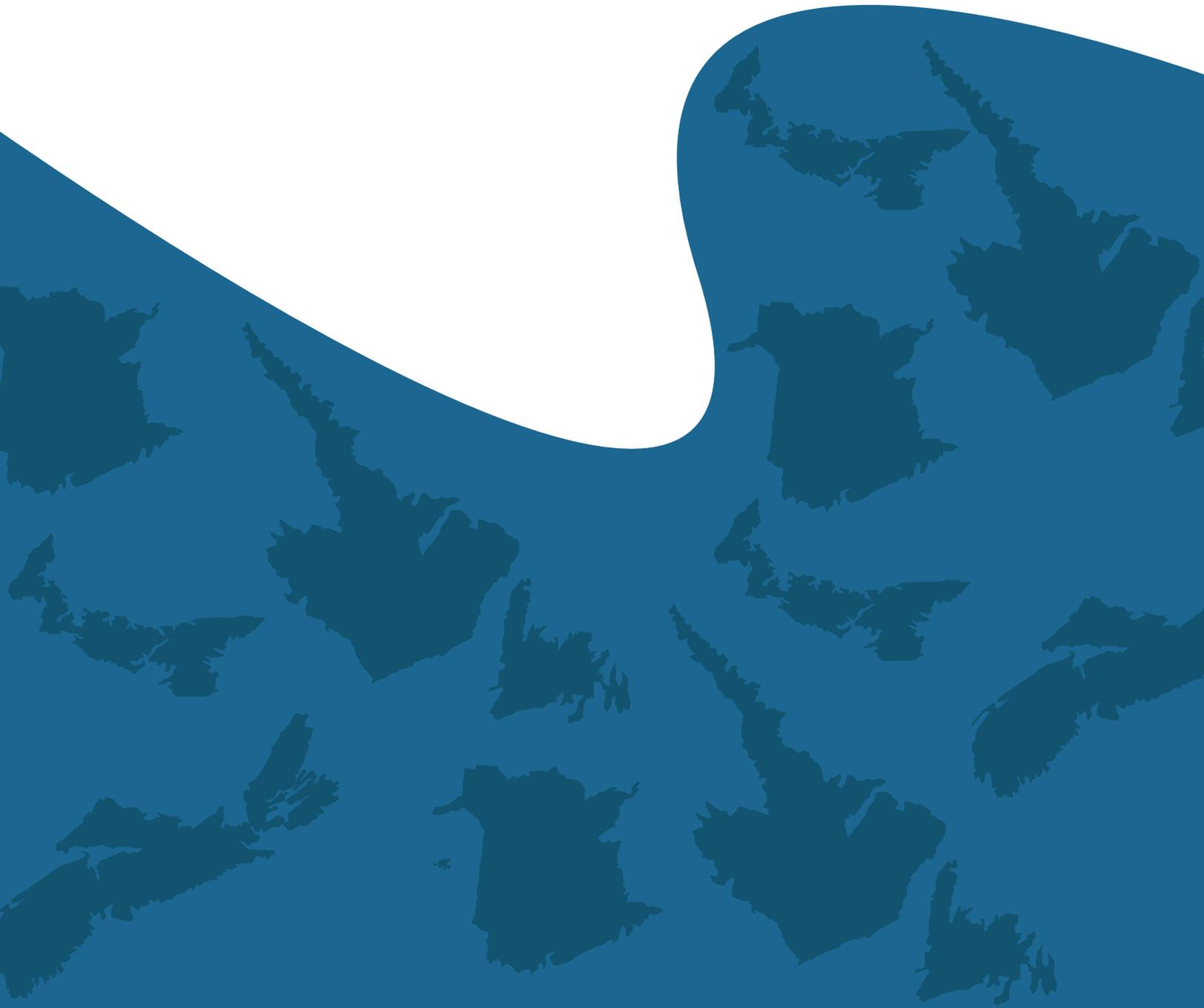


# BUILDING MEDIA RELATIONS

**A Guide for Water Monitoring Groups**



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

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<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>1</b>
Pre Reading Survey .....	1
Post Reading Survey .....	1
<b>How the Media Works</b> .....	<b>2</b>
What is Media Relations .....	2
Why Media Relations is Important .....	2
Advantages and Disadvantages of Media .....	3
The Role of Journalists .....	3
Time Schedules of Journalists .....	4
<b>Writing Science for the Media</b> .....	<b>5</b>
Simplifying the Complex .....	5
The Structure of Media Writing .....	7
Canadian Press Style .....	8
<b>Getting in the News</b> .....	<b>9</b>
What is Newsworthy .....	9
The News Release .....	10
<b>Contacting and Responding to the Media</b> .....	<b>13</b>
Before Contacting the Media .....	13
The Media Pitch .....	14
Creating a Media List .....	15
If You Don't Hear Back .....	16
Responding to Inquiries .....	16
<b>Interviews with the Media</b> .....	<b>17</b>
Preparing for the interview .....	17
Creating Key Messages .....	17
How to Structure Interview Answers .....	18
Interview Prep Worksheet .....	19
<b>Moving Forward</b> .....	<b>20</b>
Post Reading Survey .....	20
<b>References</b> .....	<b>21</b>



# INTRODUCTION

An organization's success is largely determined by its ability to communicate important information to key audiences. An essential component of strong communication is building lasting relationships with the media, as news coverage brings attention to an organization's cause or message and ultimately helps shape its reputation.

The purpose of this guide is to equip Atlantic Water Network with the tools to effectively build strong media relationships, and use these connections to communicate its findings to key audiences. This guide will benefit any of AWN's members likely to interact with the media – namely the organization's director, program manager, research and policy manager, environmental communication officer, or research coordinator. It could also serve as a useful tool for any of AWN's community partners throughout Atlantic Canada.

**In reading this manual, you'll first learn how the media works so you know what to expect in the world of news. Since much of your contact with the media will likely be the result of your own proactive efforts, you'll be shown how to write for the media in a scientific context. Then, you'll be guided through best practices for contacting the media to make the most of your interactions. Lastly, you'll learn how to prepare for and carry out interviews in the event that you successfully make contact with the media.**

Before you begin your media training journey, please complete a brief three-minute pre-reading survey to assess your understanding of the topics covered in the guide prior to reading about them.

A post-reading survey is also available complete at the end of the manual. It will be an opportunity to provide feedback and assess your understanding of the topics after reading about them.

Thank you for your participation!

**Pre-Reading Survey | <https://forms.gle/zsyqcuTgBTBg7cNU7>**



# 1

## HOW THE MEDIA WORKS

### What is Media Relations?

To put it simply, media relations refers to an organization's relationship with the media. Media in this context refers to news organizations and their staff across broadcast, print, social and digital news. Media relations involves liaising with media staff to inform the public of an organization's key messages, mission, practices and policies in a positive manner. Media relations is one of the few communications practices where your message goes through a gatekeeper – the media – before reaching your end audience.<sup>1</sup>

#### Proactive Media Relations

- Actively seek out media opportunities
- Approaching a journalist and ask them if they're interested in hearing more about your organization or issue

#### Reactive Media Relations

- Waiting for the media to call you
- Answering questions when a journalist calls you to comment on a story

#### Passive Media Relations

- Opportunities to communicate are ignored
- Not approaching journalists and declining to answer their questions

### Why Media Relations is Important

Knowing how to manage your organization's public profile is more important than ever before. The reputation of an organization is the responsibility of its members, but the public's perception of an organization is influenced by many factors.<sup>2</sup> The media has the ability to reach influential people and the general public, tell them what issues they should think about, how they should think about them and who has worthwhile things to say about these issues. Having a relationship with the media positions your organization to be on the minds of the public.<sup>3</sup>

**Aim for proactive media relations. Seeking out media attention is generally good for an organization and media relations should be practiced regularly in order to build skills and experience.**

Practicing media relations will become more comfortable with time. Speaking with media, answering difficult questions, and anticipating upcoming opportunities will be second nature to your media-trained employees. Developing these skills will allow your organization to put the power of media to work – providing visibility, legitimacy and credibility to the organization and its goals. Additionally, having third-party endorsements is an effective way to establish an organization's reputation. Good media relations can help achieve this.<sup>4</sup>

An organization should seek opportunities to work with the media before a potential crisis hits. This allows for the organization to build a relationship and become familiar with how the media works prior to a critical situation. When a crisis does hit, media coverage will be unavoidable. Having a positive relationship with the media will soften the blow and will likely allow for greater say in what information is put out.

## Advantages and Disadvantages of Media

### Advantages

- Information can be spread quickly and efficiently
- Quick, efficient, low-cost means of reaching your target audience
- Able to amplify voices that otherwise would have gone unheard

### Disadvantages

- Misinformation can spread quickly
- Awareness of an organization in the media doesn't guarantee positive reception by the audience
- Already powerful and wealthy voices can be prioritized

## The Role of Journalists

Journalists are qualified professionals, with a high level of education and training. The rise of social media, the era of 24/7 news television, and evolving media business models have dramatically changed the world of journalism. Changes are fast-paced, ongoing, and have been extensive enough to cause debate as to what it means to be a journalist in the 21st century. In comparing journalism today to journalism a decade ago, an entirely new skill set is needed.

The job description of a journalist is broad and is not limited to writing and editing. Tasks associated with journalism include:

- Determining subject matter and undertaking research by interviewing, attending public events and performances, seeking out records and reviewing written work;
- Writing articles and submitting draft manuscripts to newspaper, magazine, periodical or program editors;
- Selecting materials for broadcast or publication; checking style, grammar, accuracy, spelling and legality of content; and arranging for any revisions; and
- Meeting with production staff to final proof copies prior to printing.<sup>5</sup>

From a journalist's perspective, you are a potential source of information for a story they want to tell. The first step to developing good media relations is having respect for what journalists do. Their objective is to write valuable and newsworthy stories that will be of interest to their readers. It's not their job to provide organizations or individuals with free publicity.<sup>6</sup>

It's important to note that a journalist's expertise lies in journalism and in the news, likely not in the field they happen to be covering. Journalists have become increasingly versatile to succeed. Beat reporting, in which journalists cover a specific topic or subject area, is becoming a thing of the past. Instead of focusing on one area of expertise, journalists are required to adapt constantly – covering all kinds of topics. It's crucial to communicate your message clearly, as a journalist may be unfamiliar with the subject.

Maintaining positive, long-term relationships with journalists can lead to many advantages. A journalist who has a positive working relationship with an organization is much more likely to provide coverage than a journalist with no existing relationship. Additionally, a journalist you've worked with before is more likely to approach you when they are seeking a source for an article. This coverage can be valuable in establishing your organization as a source of expertise. While positive media relationships don't always guarantee positive coverage, they help maintain some control of the narrative.

Remember that journalists are just trying to do their job. You shouldn't spend much time preparing for bad and unfair interactions. However, bad questions do get asked, so it's important to be able to recognize them. You'll be learning how to prepare for these situations in [chapter five](#) of this guide.

## Time Schedules of Journalists

It's not uncommon for journalists to cover politics, sports, business and crime all in one day. Their day may consist of moving from one location to another, taking phone calls, interviews, writing and editing on the go – all while balancing short deadlines. This leaves little time to spare. Print and broadcast media have their own distinct processes for news coverage. This affects how journalists gather news, when they do so, and how much they write.

Most daily newspapers are delivered early in the morning – in order to allow time for printing and distribution, stories must be finalized no later than 11 p.m. Most evening news stations air around 6 p.m., but producers and editors are already looking for stories as early as 8 a.m. Most radio stations start broadcasting at 5 a.m., starting with a recap of the previous day's major stories, adding new features as the day goes on. For those who work closely with the media, this schedule means their day kicks off around 5 a.m. and ends around midnight.<sup>7</sup>

Keeping these time frames in mind is important and can help an organization decide when things like media releases should be sent out. As a general rule of thumb, you should not contact journalists after 3 p.m.

Journalists believe that changes in the industry in the past 10 years have had significant impacts on their work. According to the National Council for the Training of Journalists,

- 85 per cent think that they have had to become more multi-skilled, needing to perform a wider range of tasks.
- 70 per cent suggest that work intensity has increased, with a need to develop more stories.
- 67 per cent now produce work for a wider range of outlets and must write across different platforms.<sup>8</sup>

# 2



## WRITING SCIENCE FOR THE MEDIA

Journalists started to interact with researchers more frequently when audiences showed an interest in how science affects their lives. However, the relationship between these two professions is generally strained. Science experts believe that news coverage is often inaccurate because journalists don't understand scientific concepts. Meanwhile, journalists say that scientists don't have the communication skills needed to clearly share their ideas.<sup>1</sup>

As a researcher, knowing how to write for the media will help you bridge this gap. You'll not only be able to accurately share your message, but journalists will remember you as a reliable contact.

### Simplifying the Complex

As Newsom and Haynes point out, journalists and their audiences don't have the time to read every media release or article. Most audiences quickly scan news articles rather than read the full story. News stories have short reading times for this exact reason. The following writing tools can help make your research media-friendly.<sup>2</sup>

#### Sentence Length

Short sentences help readers process information. Long sentences that include three or more points can easily obscure your message and confuse readers. While a mix of short and long sentences helps with reading flow, a good guide is to have an average sentence length of 16 words in your work. For instance, the average sentence length for this paragraph is 15 words.

#### Tips for Editing Sentence Length

- Look for sentences that could be split into two. Avoid putting two ideas in one sentence by removing connectors like "however" start a new sentence instead;
- Use the active voice. It will make your writing more exciting and cut unnecessary words; and

**"A research team was led by a group of volunteers on Saturday."**

VS.

**"Volunteers led a research team on Saturday."**

- Read what you've written aloud. If it sounds clunky or you find yourself needing to pause in the middle of a sentence, edit it.

#### Word Choice

Using words that your audience understands is just as important as your message. Lengthy or uncommon words will lose readers because either they won't understand what you're saying, or it will take too long to parse through your writing. Using plain, everyday language will make your message understandable to audiences outside of your industry. Some technical terms may seem necessary, but oftentimes they can be replaced. For instance, the "turbidity" of a watershed is important, but you can just as easily say "clarity."

#### Describe to Define

Some terms may be unavoidable when writing a science story for the media. In these cases, it's important to define concepts using a general audience's level of understanding. One way to accomplish this technique is to describe concepts using clear, descriptive language over abstract definitions.

Newsom and Haynes show this method by talking about kilowatt-hour. You could define this term by telling readers that a kilowatt-hour is "the amount of energy consumed when an electrical demand of a kilowatt is maintained for one hour." However, readers will connect with and understand, "the amount of electricity it takes to run a blow dryer for an hour" much more.

#### Science journalist, Bethany Halford, has this media advice for researchers.<sup>3</sup>

- Speak to the press the same way you would explain your latest finding to your dentist
- Don't use industry jargon or too many acronyms
- Use metaphors and analogies to explain unfamiliar ideas
- Say what you've done and why it's important in two or three sentences
- Share details of any personal stories or connections to the work
- Don't take it personally when a reporter can't include all the details

A list of common scientific phrases and their plain language replacements:<sup>4</sup>

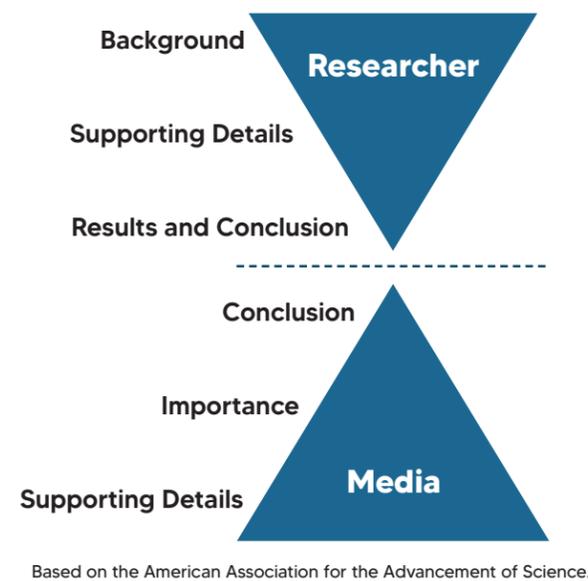
Word or Phrase	Replacement Word
Subsequently.....	then
Demonstrate.....	show
Frequently.....	often
As well as.....	and
In the event of.....	if
As a consequence of.....	because
Due to the fact.....	because
Similar to.....	like
The majority of.....	most
In the interim.....	meanwhile
Makes an attempt.....	tries
A considerable amount of.....	much
Optimal.....	best
Approximately.....	about

## The Structure of Media Writing

Research papers and news articles generally follow two different writing styles. Researchers prove their findings with detailed research and methodologies, while journalists deliver important news to their audiences through a quick and easy-to-read format. The American Association for the Advancement of Science shows these two approaches with the following diagram.<sup>6</sup>

Research papers start with a background on the subject and then explain what methods were used to collect information. Readers can then find the results of the report at the very end of the paper. This structure requires a high commitment level from audiences, as they need to read a lengthy text to understand the main points and significance of the paper.

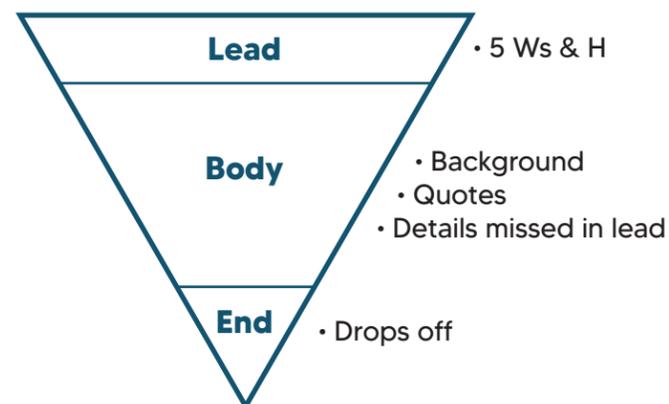
In media writing, this process is flipped to capture attention from the first few sentences. While the attention-grabbing element is important in all media writing, the overall structure of a story can vary depending on whether it's hard or soft news.



**It's important to structure your story the same way a journalist would when writing for the media. You can support your message with facts and explanations, but the central point and importance of your work should not be buried within them.**

### Hard News

Hard news stories focus on straightforward reporting and time-sensitive events. They start with a lead, or central point, that summarizes the newsworthy event in one sentence and then follows with its relevance. Supporting details take up the remainder of the article so that if readers skim the information they will still leave with the main point. Hard news stories use the "inverse triangle" model.



### Soft News

Soft news stories focus more on the human element of a newsworthy event. They're not necessarily time-dependent like hard news stories are. Although these stories are written more creatively and contain more quotes, they still have the basic elements of a lead and supporting details. The lead, however, is delayed and may appear a few paragraphs into the story.

<b>Delayed Lead</b>	• Spans three short paragraphs
<b>Body</b>	• Several quotes • Background • Descriptive writing
<b>End</b>	• Wraps up story • Often finishes with a strong quote

### The 5 Ws & H

News articles start by giving readers the key details of the story. An effective way of checking off important details is to make sure you include the 5 Ws & H – what, when, where, why, who and how.

- **What** the newsworthy event is and its significance
- **When** the event is happening or has happened
- **Where** the event is taking place or took place
- **Why** the event is happening or has happened
- **Who** key players in the story are
- **How** the newsworthy event came to be

### Canadian Press Style

Canadian Press style is the writing style used by the Canadian Press – Canada's national news agency and the largest supplier of multimedia content to outlets throughout the country.<sup>5</sup> When writing for the media, using CP style will increase your chances of receiving news coverage, as your writing will need less revision.

Detailed explanations of various writing tools and technical guides can be found in The Canadian Press Stylebook. This training manual will cover just a few basic rules to guide you when writing for the media.

#### Headlines:

- Headlines should grab the reader's attention and entice them to read more
- They must provide a good understanding of what the story is about
- Avoid headlines that could be interpreted in more than one way
- Capitalize only the first letter in the first word of a headline (except in cases where capitalization is required by CP standards)
- They're typically around six words – make them no longer than eight

#### Capitalization:

- Occupational titles and job descriptions should be lowercase (Ex: field coordinator Jane Doe)
- Capitalize formal titles when they're directly in front of a person's name, but lowercase them if they stand alone or are separated from the name with commas (Ex: Prime Minister Trudeau vs. Justin Trudeau is the current prime minister)
- Capitalize awards, honours and decorations when written in their full name (Ex: Nobel Peace Prize)
- Capitalize the first word of a full quotation (Ex: Jane Doe asked, "Will you meet me there?")

#### Spelling:

- Use a.m. and p.m. for times, with the exception of using noon in place of 12 p.m.
- For specific dates, abbreviate months with more than five letters (Ex: Jan. 1, 2021), but spell them out whole when they stand alone or with a year (Ex: January 2021).

#### Common faults:

- Don't write in passive voice instead, use active voice
- When dealing with statistics and numbers, never make the reader do the math (Ex: Don't say something has increased by 25 per cent without giving a base figure)

#### Numbers:

- Use figures for 10 and above, but spell out whole numbers when they're below 10 (Ex: Atlantic Water Network provided two organizations with supplies to monitor 12 streams)
- For numbers with four or more digits, use commas (Ex: 1,000)
- When dealing with percentages, spell out "per cent" rather than using the symbol (Ex: Water monitoring efforts increased by 25 per cent...)

#### Punctuation:

- Always put commas and periods within quotation marks (Ex: "I'll come by later," Doe said.)

## 3

## GETTING IN THE NEWS

Journalists want to report on what's interesting to their audiences. To have your stories published, you need to understand what's considered newsworthy and what parts of your work appeal to that criteria.

### What is Newsworthy?

The book, *In the News: The Practice of Media Relations In Canada*, lays out a few criteria that define a good news story.<sup>1</sup>

The following examples will show the different ways that a water monitoring story could be pitched through a headline. Try out this exercise on your own and think of the different ways you would angle the story.

**Example scenario:** A year-long water monitoring project has found that the water quality of a town's river has diminished since the addition of new livestock farms.

#### News Criteria

##### Impact and Emotion:

Readers are interested in how events will impact themselves and others. Consider the number of people that will be affected, how immediate this impact will be, its severity and if it's positive or negative.

**Example:** E.coli in well water puts town water use on hold.

##### Novelty:

These are unusual and bizarre stories. They can range from a comical interruption of everyday life, such as a bird moving into a store, to a large departure from trusted routines, like a child being forgotten on a school bus.

**Example:** Missing farm sheep are found taking a swim.

##### Proximity:

Local stories are one of the top-ranked news items by readers. Angling a story to minimize the distance between its impacts and the audience creates more interest.

**Example:** Water contamination growing more common in town county.

##### Timeliness:

Some events need to be reported as soon as possible. This can be due to ongoing updates, the seriousness of the information, or how long the information will be relevant.

**Example:** Residents should start filtering drinking water immediately, says water expert.

##### Topical/Prominence:

Other time-related stories can involve connecting a story to topics that are currently relevant or well-known to readers.

**Example:** Recent water contamination confirms previous farm expansion concerns.

##### Conflict:

Disagreements are generally seen as more newsworthy than agreements. This can involve topics such as strikes, advocacy, politics, or disputes between decision-makers.

**Example:** Protests to protect town river continue.

These criteria of newsworthiness can apply to a broad range of topics. *The Hands-on Guide for Science Communicators* adds to this list with a few additional criteria that can be relevant to a good science news story.<sup>2</sup>

##### Mystery:

A mysterious phenomenon, quirky details, an unexpected result or a chance discovery.

##### Major Discovery:

Huge discoveries of new events or classifications. A gain in knowledge about an impactful topic can also be considered a major discovery.

##### A Record:

Setting a record for the first, largest, fastest, oldest and other criteria usually make for quick, exciting news stories.

##### Published Results:

If your results are going to be published in a major journal, or be used by important decision-makers, journalists may put more weight into its newsworthiness.

### The News Release

If you're taking a proactive approach to media relations, you'll likely find yourself writing a news release on more than one occasion. News releases are a vital source for reporters, as a large number of stories are found this way.<sup>3</sup> They also serve as a tool for organizations looking to share important information broadly and quickly.

#### How to Write a News Release

While news releases are brief and never longer than a page, length can vary depending on whether they're being created for print, television or radio. The longest news releases are usually those produced for print, the shortest are for radio, and in between are the ones made for TV.<sup>4</sup>

News releases should always be written according to CP style to mimic journalistic standards. They should also be clear, succinct and provide all the necessary details a reporter needs for context.

## Formatting a News Release

The following template shows how a standard news release is formatted.<sup>5</sup>

Distribution date (This is the date you are sending out the news release.)

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE → This signals to journalists that the news story is ready to be published. Do not send a news release if it has any information that cannot be immediately released by the media.

**Bolded headline** → Make sure your headline is accurate, no longer than eight words and that it's clear what your news release is about.

**Lead Paragraph:** The lead paragraph is the first one or two sentence(s) of the news release and is used to hook the reader. The most common type of lead is the summary lead, which gives a clear and short summary of the information at hand.<sup>6</sup> The 5 Ws & H are outlined here to give the reporter an immediate understanding of the story's basic details, and any newsworthy criteria are also highlighted.

**Second Paragraph:** This is where you'd include a strong supportive quote from your key spokesperson for the story, which adds more weight to the information given in the lead.

**Third Paragraph:** If you didn't manage to cover all 5 Ws & H in your lead paragraph, you have a chance to do so here. There's also room for additional details and quotes in this paragraph.

**Fourth Paragraph:** Additional details, quotes and background information can be placed here to give more context for the situation.

**Fifth and Sixth Paragraphs:** These paragraphs are optional but can be included to provide more background information if necessary.

**Boilerplate Paragraph:** This final paragraph is a short but broad snippet of information about your organization. It may describe what your organization does, where it's located, mission and website URL.

-30- → This centered number indicates that the news release has ended. An alternative option is ###.

### Media contact:

Name of the person

Their title

Phone number

Email address

→ This is who the media will follow up with if they're interested in covering your story. You could provide contact information for either yourself or your key spokesperson here.

## How to Send a News Release

News releases should be strategic in nature. While it's important to establish a communicative relationship with the media, it's just as important to respect a reporter's limited time and not send them information that isn't newsworthy. Always consider whether your story includes newsworthy criteria before releasing it to the media.

**Be sure to consider timing – news often fades out as quickly as it appears. Try to distribute your news release the day a story happens, whenever possible. You must also make sure the contact or spokesperson you've listed on your news release is available to interact with the media the day you send it out.**

Who you send your news release to also matters. Refer to your media list and choose a reporter who would be interested in sharing your news through the intended medium. If they are unavailable, contact the appropriate editor for the story's topic.

Lastly, make your news release convenient and accessible. Reporters typically prefer to receive tips through email, so use this method whenever possible. Don't attach your news release as a separate document. Instead, paste it directly into the body of the email.

If your news release doesn't receive a follow-up, don't get discouraged. Reporters don't run every story idea they're given and there are often countless to choose from. The reward of receiving coverage when your news release is picked, however, is worth every bit of effort.

The best time to put out a news release is early in the week and at the beginning of the day. Ideally, aim for Tuesday and Wednesday mornings between 8 a.m. and 10 a.m. to increase the likelihood of it being read.

### Headline Writing Tip:

If you're unsure about your headline, do a quick test. See if someone who isn't familiar with your news release can get an idea of what it's about by reading the headline alone.

## 4

## CONTACTING AND RESPONDING TO THE MEDIA

 Before Contacting the Media

Proactively engaging with the media is crucial for building positive relationships. Before contacting and responding to the media, there are a few things to consider and plan for. Putting some thought into your interactions beforehand will help you make a lasting impression for both you and your organization and build positive media relationships.

## The Story

A large part of being prepared is making sure that your story will genuinely spark interest. Remember that what's news to your organization might not necessarily always be newsworthy to the public. Make sure that what you bring to a journalist fits at least one of your [news criteria](#). Also, it's not only newsworthiness that matters. Your presentation of the topic at hand is just as important. The media should be able to easily understand your story and the key points within it. Framing your story effectively will greatly impact your likelihood of receiving coverage.

## The Important Details

Making sure you're prepared to answer any questions the media might ask on the spot is also very important. Creating a list of potential questions and answers based on the key details of your story will help you approach the interaction with more confidence in what you're going to say. It'll also help you avoid long awkward pauses and flustered responses if any immediate questions do happen to come up.

## The Type of Media

Choosing what type of media channel you'll contact is a strategic decision. You might decide between print news, online news, radio, or television outlets – each of which have their own pros and cons that could shape your decision.

For instance, newspapers that only operate in print have limited reach in comparison to outlets that also publish their work online. Additionally, news stations that require a subscription will be inaccessible to many readers, but will give you strong credibility to their subscribers. More traditional media like television and radio lack the ability to be shared easily on social media, but give you access to those who don't have reliable internet.

When choosing your medium, be aware of deadlines and know where your story is going to be published. When and where your story will be published is something that you can clarify with the journalist.

## The Contact Method

Calling and emailing are both acceptable ways of contacting journalists. The best way to retrieve contact information for a media outlet is on its website. By using the email or phone numbers listed, you can contact specific journalists or editors about a story you'd like covered.

If you choose to contact a reporter directly using one of these methods, do your research first. Make sure the reporter you're contacting has written articles that are relevant to your news topic and that it appeals to their audiences.

 The Media Pitch

A media pitch is a proposal that can be sent to a media outlet for the purpose of selling a story. An important note for media pitches is to make sure that you have made all the information clear so media outlets can recognize how the story will interest their readers.<sup>1</sup>

**It's important to remember when writing a media pitch that you're pitching a story and not your organization. A journalist won't be interested in publishing an advertisement for your organization, they'll be looking for a story. Make sure that the newsworthy event is at the forefront of your media pitch.<sup>2</sup>**

## Calling

When calling the media to pitch a story, organize a simple script beforehand. A script will help you feel more prepared, as it helps guide the conversation and serves as a reminder of what you'd like to say. The following step-by-step guide can be used to help build your script:

- 1) Start by introducing yourself and your organization.
- 2) Transition to the purpose of your call, making sure you cover the [5 Ws & H](#).
- 3) Ask if the journalist is interested in setting up an interview.

It's important to get to the news angle quickly during your call – try to grab the journalist's attention from the start, but never exaggerate your story in the process. Any information you provide should be accurate and realistic.

## Emailing

Similar to calling to make a media pitch, an email should be brief and to the point and provide a way for the recipient to follow up with you. The following template shows how you can structure a media pitch email.

**Subject Line:** Subject lines should be a maximum of four words and capture the key appeal of your story.

Hello [ Name ],

**Sentence One:** Identify yourself and your organization. Within the same sentence, tag on information about the type of organization you are a part of.

**Sentence Two and Three:** State the story lead, including the 5 Ws & H. Emphasize the news appeal of your story.

**Sentence Four:** If applicable, you can tie the pitch to the contact's interest or previous work in one sentence.

Conclude with the contact information of your assigned media relations staff and an invitation to reach out. You can also say that you will be following up by phone call and provide a specific date that you plan to call by.

Thank you,  
[Your email signature]

## Creating a Media List

A media list is a document that keeps track of potential contacts you can send stories to. Storing this information will speed up the process of having to contact the media in the case of a crisis or time sensitive event. It also allows you to keep track of what media outlets have shown an interest in your organization. Information such as the audience, timeframe, and medium of each outlet can be recorded in a media list. You can also keep note of which journalists tend to cover environmental topics and work to build a relationship with them.

You can build your media list by reaching out to news organizations to confirm their contact information. A quick phone call stating that you're updating the media list for your organization is acceptable and routine. The following table can serve as a starting point for creating a media list in Nova Scotia.

News Outlets	Medium	Aligned Interest	Local	Audience	Timely	Pros	Cons
<b>CBC Nova Scotia</b>	Online/ Radio/TV	Yes	No	Big – CBC has numerous platforms to reach a vast number of people.	Yes – have daily news outlets. Will have competition and will need to be well-prepared for interview.	Three different platforms to get news across.	Big platform and may be overrun with news tips.
<b>Halifax Today</b>	Online	Yes	Yes	Small – Halifax Today doesn't have a big audience.	Yes – website is updated 24/7.	Smaller news site heightens chances of getting coverage.	Doesn't reach a big audience.
<b>The Coast</b>	Online/ Limited print	Yes	Yes	Small – mostly known for their formerly monthly print format.	Website is timely. Print is not timely and is released inconsistently.	Accessible and free to readers.	Doesn't reach a broad audience.
<b>The Chronicle Herald</b>	Online/ Print	Yes	Yes	Medium – The Chronicle Herald has a loyal audience base.	Timely, print every day, and update website regularly.	Getting on their website and in their paper would help gain exposure.	Not accessible or free for readers.
<b>Ecology Action Centre</b>	Speciality Magazine	Yes	Yes	Small, but have a vehicle that can reach multiple people.	Releases a monthly magazine.	Aligned with AWN's interests.	Small audience and is only a monthly magazine.

## If You Don't Hear Back

News outlets get a lot of tips for potential stories and often don't have time to respond to each one. When this happens, there are a few things you can do:

- Follow up with a phone call at least one business day after you've sent the email;
- Reach out to another media source once you've confirmed that your story won't be covered by the first news outlet you contacted; and
- Assume the answer is no if no further contact is made.

In attempting to reach them, be sure not to repeatedly contact them to the point that it is inappropriate.

## Responding to Inquiries

When a reporter contacts your organization it's important that the person who's talking to them knows what to do. An important part of this is identifying who the reporter is and the subject they want to talk about. Below is a list of questions you can ask a reporter who is looking for a quote or interview.

- What is your name?
- Who do you represent?
- What is the interview about?
- Where will the interview be held?
- Will the recorded interview be edited?
- Which particular aspects of the topic are you focusing on?
- Are you speaking with other sources? Will they be interviewed at the same time?
- What's your deadline?/When will the story run?
- May I call back tomorrow (or another time period, depending on the deadline)?
- What is your phone number or email?

If you need to refer the journalist to a staff member who is more knowledgeable about the subject, provide them with a time that you will call them back by. Remember that journalists are working on tight deadlines. If you say you're going to call a journalist back, make sure to keep this promise.

It's best to use a media pitch to propose a soft news story while news releases are effective to use with hard news stories.

## 5

## INTERVIEWS WITH THE MEDIA

### Preparing for the Interview

The media may contact you in response to a news release you put out, or to ask for your comment on a story that they're writing. To build a story, reporters seek out a person affected by an issue, a person responsible for an issue, or simply a person who understands and can explain an issue. These situations are when an interview takes place.<sup>1</sup>

**Don't be afraid to negotiate when a reporter calls for an unscheduled interview. Good negotiation leads to a clear agenda and boundaries for the interview.<sup>2</sup> It also provides an opportunity to guide the interview to the areas you want to focus on, and the possible inclusion of people or references you may suggest.**

When preparing for an interview, remember to:

- Research the journalist's past interviews to get a feel for their question style;
- Check facts and statistics, and consult your organization's experts on the interview topic;
- Brainstorm potential questions and create practice answers;
- Practice being brief and aim for your answers to be a length of five to 20 seconds; and
- Create three to five key messages.

### Creating Key Messages

**Key messages are the main points of information that you want your audience to receive, understand and remember. Communications cannot always be controlled, but key messages can. They can help you prioritize information and ensure consistency. Make sure that the 5 Ws & H are covered across your key messages.**

To start developing a set of key messages, think about what you want audiences to remember about your story. Identifying your communication goals is important for this exercise as they will shape your messaging. For example, if your goal is to have audiences understand the importance of water monitoring, your key messages may involve listing some of the proven benefits.

Establish three to five points based on this exercise. You can then compress these points into a few strong, simple words or a sentence each. Popular examples are "Don't drink and drive this holiday weekend," and "Art is for everyone."<sup>3</sup> During this process, remember to keep your audience in mind. Key messages should be understandable and appeal to your target audience. For example, targeting teenagers requires different language than targeting an older generation.<sup>4</sup>

When preparing your key messages, prepare your points with at least one piece of supporting information. Presenting facts, figures, or personal stories can be effective information to give to journalists.

After drafting these key messages, refine and test them.

- Do they support your communication goal?
- Can you simplify or make them more concise?
- Do they motivate the target audience to act?

### How to Structure Interview Answers

CBC Radio suggests giving the conclusion first, then providing an explanation. Reporters want you to get to the point first by answering their questions, then filling in the rest later. Keeping your responses structured in the following steps will help keep you in control of the interview.<sup>5</sup>

1. **Initial brief answer: state your message.** Set the theme and deliver a key message;
2. **Elaborate: support your message.** This may include your researched facts or statistics, a description or other explanation that you think will persuade your undecided audience; and
3. **Expand further: illustrate your message.** Provide additional evidence or analogy to prove your message.

#### Interview Dos

- Stick to the facts and avoid personal opinions;
- Use transitional bridges to keep your message on track if steered away from the subject;
- When you are at a loss for words, pause, collect your thoughts and start again;
- Repeat your key messages at different points in the interview; and
- Watch for the story when it's published

#### Interview Don'ts

- Forget your audience – keep this in mind while you craft your messages;
- Agree to go off the record as there is no such thing;
- Repeat inaccurate information, instead, correct it;
- Repeat "bait" or loaded words that may be used in questions;
- Lie or avoid questions; it's okay to say "I don't know."

**Make sure to cover the who, what, where, when, why and how when speaking with journalists.**

**What are the characteristics of good key messages?**

Effective key messages are:

- Concise
- Strategic
- Simple
- Memorable
- Use a call to action.

## Interview Prep Worksheet

The American Geophysical Union's public information office created the following worksheet to help researchers pin point their key messages.<sup>6</sup> Print off this page and keep it in your office as a guide.

### Prepare Your Message: A Checklist

What are the main points that you want to communicate?

- 1) \_\_\_\_\_
- 2) \_\_\_\_\_
- 3) \_\_\_\_\_

How do they affect the public's interest, health, safety and quality of life?

- 1) \_\_\_\_\_
- 2) \_\_\_\_\_
- 3) \_\_\_\_\_

What everyday analogies or metaphors will help you communicate your message?

- 1) \_\_\_\_\_
- 2) \_\_\_\_\_
- 3) \_\_\_\_\_

What are three concise key messages that you would like to use to help communicate your message?

- 1) \_\_\_\_\_
- 2) \_\_\_\_\_
- 3) \_\_\_\_\_

# 6



## MOVING FORWARD

The world of media is always evolving. Staying in the know and keeping up with these changes is key for building strong media relationships. While it may seem daunting at first, media relations becomes easier with practice and can do wonders for your organization's presence.

Now that you've been guided through some of the best practices in writing for, contacting and interviewing with the media, you have all the necessary tools to keep your organization news ready. To track your progress in each of these areas and provide feedback, please fill out the post-reading survey.

**Thank you for coming along on this media training journey!**

**Post-Reading Survey | <https://forms.gle/eFG9tgWU8sQ4Jcz47>**

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**THANK YOU FOR READING!**

