Media and social media guide for academics
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Using media and social media professionally

Media and social media are powerful tools that can be used to reach audiences beyond academia, increase the impact of your research and influence public debate public debate based on your specialist expertise.

At Macquarie University, we support academics to engage strategically with media and social media to build their public profiles and credibility as thought leaders in their fields. At the same time, this exposure helps to strengthen Macquarie’s reputation as leader in quality, excellence and impactful research.

The benefits of engaging with media and social media include:

- reaching a more diverse audience and expanding your network to include people who don’t ordinarily engage with academic research
- developing relationships and networks with other scholars
- building your credibility as an expert on a particular topic, as well as the credibility of your research centre, faculty and the University
- sharing research that’s in the public interest
- informing public debate and opinion with your specialist knowledge
- inspiring people by sharing bold and exciting discoveries and ideas
- gaining public support for research and careers in your field
- attracting the interest of potential funders or research partners.

In a survey of Macquarie academics who had a mainstream media appearance in 2020, more than 25 per cent received follow-up speaking, research, government advisory or funding opportunities.

JOINING THE PUBLIC CONVERSATION

As an academic at Macquarie, you already have a level of credibility with the public and the media, with the public and the media. Academics are often relied on to provide an expert voice and to educate their audience on complex or contentious topics.

Macquarie encourages academic and professional staff and higher degree research students to contribute to public commentary and debate on the basis of their professional expertise.

Our **Public Comment Policy** and **Social Media Policy** outline the rights and responsibilities for academics choosing to engage with media and social media.

### CONSIDER YOUR PURPOSE

- Who do you want to engage with and why?
- What do you want to get across? What is your key message or point?
- Why is your research important and to whom?
- What do you want to get out of this interaction? Do you want to recruit people to your study, share your findings or influence decision-makers?
- When would be the ideal time to communicate your message?
- How does this exposure and interaction relate to your research strategy?
Using media and social media strategically

IMPORTANCE OF A MEDIA AND SOCIAL MEDIA STRATEGY
Building a profile in the media or a social media following takes sustained effort over months or years. Having a clear strategy and plan will help to ensure your efforts are directed to your overarching objectives or goals, and achieve the intended results. Media and social media are crowded spaces – in Australia, news media diversity is shrinking, while we have 20.5 million social media users. One in three minutes online is now spent on social¹, and 37 per cent of people say social media is their main source of news². So if you’re investing a lot of time and energy into engaging with media or running a personal social account, you’ll want to make sure you’re achieving cut-through.

Your personal media and social media strategy should be guided by purpose – whether you choose to take a more research-focused approach and use social media primarily as a tool of dissemination and engagement for your research, or you want to engage more widely as a public communicator and commentator on issues surrounding your expertise.

Consider these four key points when developing a personal strategy:
1. What is your main objective? Is it to inform, to connect or to advocate?
2. Who is your intended target audience – Macquarie academics, other scholars, research partners or parents? It’s normal to have multiple target audiences, but it helps to at least have a clear idea of who they are and their behaviours and interests rather than trying to reach everyone.
3. What’s the most appropriate channel to reach your target audience? What might work well for Twitter may not be relevant for LinkedIn, because audiences and their actions vary by channel. If your research is of interest only to accountants, go for a targeted approach (eg trade magazine).
4. What types of content will you pitch or post? This question will be informed by your answers to the first three questions.

ENGAGING WITH THE COMMUNICATIONS TEAM

PROCESSES
Macquarie’s communications team protects the University’s reputation and promotes academic research. We do this by providing strategic advice and telling the University’s stories through internal and external channels to engage with students, staff, academics, industry and the wider community.

The team is made up of:
- communications partner team
- media team
- social media team.

If you’re not sure who to contact, email communications@mq.edu.au.

WHEN CONTACTING THE COMMUNICATIONS TEAM, TAKE THE TIME TO THINK ABOUT THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:
- What’s your key message?
- What do you want to achieve?
- Who do you want to speak to?
- What does the audience need to know, and why should they care?
- What do you want people to think or do, as an outcome of the communications?
- What’s the timing?
- What content do you have – photos, video, infographics?

Communications partners work closely with academics to understand their objectives and recommend appropriate communications approaches and channels to achieve the best result.

The communications partner may connect you with our media team, who run The Lighthouse (the University’s own news platform), develop media releases and pitch your research or expert opinion to the media.

Communications partners also work with the social media team to develop and execute social media content across all of Macquarie’s social media accounts (Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter and Instagram), and to provide strategic advice across the University on the proper use of social media channels and content to achieve desired communications outcomes. Content that is appropriate for sharing on our social media channels can be briefed into the social media team via the communications partner for your faculty.

¹ Digital 2021 Australia, We Are Social website
² http://www.roymorgan.com/findings/8492-main-sources-news-trust-june-2020-202008170619#:~:text=Over%2012.7%20million%20Australians%20(%o.8%23%o
specifically%nominating%20Social%20Media
PLAN AHEAD
Planning ahead will give you the best result and allow you to make the most of the University’s resources if you’re hoping to achieve media coverage. Adequate lead time is needed to prepare media materials and pitch the story to the right journalists.

For instance, if you’re publishing a research paper that you think might be newsworthy, get in contact with your communications partner as soon as your paper has been accepted for publication. You will not be breaking the journal’s embargo policy by providing your communications partner with advance warning. It’s harder to get coverage for research that has already been published: journalists don’t like to feel they’re reporting old news.

USING YOUR MACQUARIE AFFILIATION
Using your Macquarie affiliation when speaking to the media at conferences or on your professional social media profile helps build your credibility and reputation as a Macquarie academic.

In the media
Be proactive and tell the journalist your title and what affiliation to use for you. For TV (where it needs to fit on screen) use ‘Macquarie University’, but for radio or print you can include more detail, for example, ‘Department of Philosophy at Macquarie University’ or ‘Australian Institute of Health Innovation, Macquarie University’. For international media interviews use ‘Macquarie University, Sydney, Australia’. Try to mention Macquarie University at least once during the interview. If you’re doing an on-camera interview, you can place yourself in front of something branded (such as a screensaver or a banner).

Social media
Staff should include their Macquarie credentials and/or link to their Pure research profile in their social media bio, if using social media in a professional capacity. This helps users identify who you are and can improve the discoverability of your account.

Conferences
Your involvement in a conference reflects on the reputation of Macquarie, and it’s important to mention your affiliation. Branded templates for your presentation are available for use and should be used when presenting your research.

Social media isn’t just a means of publicising your work; it’s also a great way to network with others in your field, particularly at conferences. Live tweeting is an impactful way of connecting your network to your own work. If you have a Twitter account, it’s highly recommended that you live tweet from a conference, so that you’re providing updates in real time, which will help boost your profile and reputation. Large conferences will often have a specific hashtag that you should use when sharing or commenting on what is happening at the event, and following the hashtag also allows you to follow what other attendees are saying. You should also remember to tag key speakers using the @ symbol, which increases the likelihood of them engaging with your tweet or resharing your content.

PLANNING AHEAD
Think about what you have coming up and contact your communications partner in advance. These may include:

- books
- major events, awards or conferences
- new research projects needing participants
- partnerships with industry or other universities
- research papers
- topical issues that relate to your expertise.
HOW TO FIND THE NEWSWORTHY ANGLE IN YOUR RESEARCH?

The media are interested in new research, but it’s important to consider what are likely to be the most newsworthy elements of your work before you approach your communications partner with your story idea. Brainstorm by thinking about what parts of your research a newspaper or trade journal in your area of interest might be interested in. Get into the habit of reading news with a notebook and pen in hand. Scan the headlines and ask yourself, “What is in the news today that ties in with what I want to promote?” or brainstorm what a short punchy headline about your research findings would look like. Look for a new perspective on a topic that’s currently in the public eye and how you might connect your research to trending topics.

PRINCIPLES OF NEWSWORTHINESS

Determining whether your research is newsworthy involves asking yourself “so what”. The more of these boxes your story ticks, the more likely it’s to be of interest to the media. While news values are similar for all types of media, publications will look for what is newsworthy for their audience, so there can be multiple angles that increase your chance of coverage in trade publications, special-interest media or mainstream outlets.

How to decide whether your idea is newsworthy:

- **Impact and scale**: How many people will this affect? Use examples or statistics that emphasise the fact that your story will be of interest to a range of people or that the issue you’re dealing with is widespread and important. Journalists and producers constantly ask: “What does this mean for the average person?” For trade or niche publications, consider the level of impact for people in that field.

- **Conflict**: If something is being argued about or is controversial, it’s more likely to be newsworthy. If people have been debating issues that directly affect your field/area of expertise, that puts you in a good position to get it covered by media. Ongoing debates central to your field of research may be newsworthy for trade publications.

- **Timeliness**: Is this research new and groundbreaking, or a first? Another way of making a story timely is to tie it in with a current or upcoming announcement or event, such as an awareness day or a government report.

- **Change and trends**: Journalists are always interested in change and initiatives that will shape the future. Include statistics or examples that illustrate new trends: the media views quantitative data as newsworthy, accurate and easily digestible.

- **Prominence**: If a high-profile person or event is associated with your story, you’re in luck. If the person is well known in your field but not to the general public, trade publications are more likely to be interested.

- **Currency**: Are there similar stories currently circulating in the media? Has a particular journalist written about your issue recently? If so, a follow-up story with a new twist or different angle might be a possibility.

- **Human interest**: Using a personal story or a case study relating to your research can make your story stronger. Situations that pull on heartstrings, stories about overcoming adversity and emotive interview opportunities with individuals can help grab a journalist’s attention. Or perhaps the human-interest angle is about one of the researchers themselves, if they’ve got a particularly amazing backstory.

WHAT IS THE MEDIA LOOKING FOR?

Build up your resources and online presence, so that when you have something to say, you’ve got everything at your fingertips to give it the best chance of media success.

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<td>- Be your own media: start by creating your own content online</td>
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<td>- Social media: Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, YouTube</td>
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<td>- Website and blogs</td>
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TRANSLATING YOUR RESEARCH

Academic writing and news writing are very different in nature. In an academic paper, the most important findings are often found in the discussion and conclusion. News stories are organised using the inverted pyramid style, in which information is presented in descending order of importance. Media outlets grab and hold a reader’s attention by giving them the most interesting, newsworthy details first.

By understanding the way news is written, you’ll be able to communicate more effectively with the media:

- Put the most newsworthy information first.
- Keep it simple and succinct.
- Use active not passive voice.
- Avoid jargon and acronyms, and use everyday words.

PROFESSOR MICHELLE ARROW
DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY AND ARCHAEOLOGY

“I think the biggest benefit to engaging with the media about my research is that it has made me a much better communicator. The skills I have learned through writing for media audiences, or doing media interviews have really honed my ability to communicate clearly and directly about important issues, and explaining why my research is significant to a general audience.”

Connect with Professor Michelle Arrow

THE LIGHTHOUSE

The Lighthouse is Macquarie’s own multimedia news publishing platform. This is our primary channel for research news and academic opinion, and is aimed at a general audience. We connect researchers with professional writers to produce newsworthy and accessible editorial-style stories that highlight Macquarie’s latest research, academic opinion pieces on topical issues and simple ‘explainers’ on common questions.

As well as the readers who subscribe to the website, the media frequently use The Lighthouse as a resource for stories and content.

MEDIA RELEASES

The media team issues all media releases on behalf of the University, which generally cover university-level announcements. We also issue media releases for new research papers where appropriate.

A media release addresses the basic who, what, why, how, where and when of the story. We may ask you to draft a first version of the media release, which we will finalise.

- **Who** has done/is doing the research? This doesn’t mean listing all your collaborators. This means mentioning the key researchers and their organisations, and any major funding bodies (not necessarily internal grants).
- **What** have you done/found out or are hoping to find out? Give an overview of your research program/news/event.
- **Why** have you done it, and why should the public care? The media is created for the public; the story has to resonate with everyday people. There has to be the human interest, whether it’s the first, biggest, strangest or most important.
- **How** did/will you make this amazing discovery or contribution to knowledge? What clever bit of kit or keen insight did you/will you have to employ?
- **Where** was this/is this being done? On the moon, in your back shed, on a ship, in a school? Which city, state and country? Journalists love local stories because they interest their readers.
- **When** did you do it, or when will it be finished? Have you just finished this research? If it’s a research study, when do you need people to sign up? Is it part of any broader projects?

TIP: WHAT MAKES A GREAT PHOTO FOR MEDIA?

Eye-catching photos and videos are great media fodder and can help sell your story. Ideally they are:

- bright in colour (children and animals are always a bonus)
- clearly identifiable subject matter
- headshots with a relevant background (eg in the lab)
- in focus and as high-resolution as possible (minimum 1MB for a photo)
- showing action that tells the story (no static group photos).

When you’re working with the media team, let us know what photos and videos you have or what photo opportunities are available.
TARGETED PITCHES
Where a story is well suited to a particular program or publication, in some cases it’s appropriate to pitch it directly to the media in a targeted way, rather than issuing a media release or writing for The Lighthouse. Media outlets are also competitive and like to have the scoop or an exclusive story, so this strategy can be particularly effective.

With targeted pitches, the media team will work on your behalf to brief the right journalist(s) and publication(s) to obtain the best coverage for your story.

OPINION PIECES AND LETTERS TO THE EDITOR
Major newspapers, online publications and trade journals often accept opinion pieces (op-eds) on current news, and this can be a great way to showcase your expertise and influence opinion on an issue. The media team can assist you to develop your op-ed theme and help guide your argument according to media topics of interest, adhere to media guidelines for op-eds, suggest potential publications and pitch your piece to media.

Drafting an op-ed
• Write 650–700 words.
• Focus on one issue or idea that is introduced in your first paragraph (don't save your argument for the last paragraph).
• Write in a timely manner, responding to current events.
• Use simple language that is engaging. Don’t use an overly formal tone or acronyms/jargon.
• Keep in mind why the reader should care and read on.
• Use humour where appropriate.
• Support your claims with data or findings – and fact check.
• Offer a new perspective: tell readers something they don't know.
• Don’t recount history or state ‘known truths’ or tired stats or cliches.
• While you can quote other opinion leaders, do this sparingly (one mention at the most).
• Own your expertise – know what you are an expert in and why.
• Respect your reader – never underestimate your reader's intelligence or overestimate their level of information.
• Repeat your message – near the end, clearly restate your position and issue a call to action.

Letters to the editor
Letters are a popular part of any publication and a great way to generate discussion on a topic or continue an existing conversation. A letter to the editor generally makes just one point on a topical issue, in fewer than 250 words. A letter should be concise, evidence-based and clearly state why the issue is important and your opinion. Try to send your letter as promptly as you can in response to the news for the best chance of being published. Mainstream publications receive large numbers of letters every day, so space is competitive. You can submit letters directly to the publication, and they’ll generally have their own guidelines for submission. Ensure you include your name and title.

THE CONVERSATION
Macquarie is a member of The Conversation, which publishes analysis, opinion and research news written by current academics and PhD students. The Conversation accepts pitches directly from academics, and once they accept the pitch, they will work with you to refine the article. The communications team can assist with crafting your pitch.
Getting your story out on social media

We want staff to feel confident using social media, so you can amplify your research and expertise, celebrate your successes, and build a network with like-minded members of your community.

PERSONAL VS PROFESSIONAL
If you're using social media to connect only with family and friends, and/or share your hobbies and interests outside of work, then your profile would be considered a personal account. However, it's possible that contacts in your professional network may find your personal account, depending on your privacy settings.

If you're using social media to share your research or work related to Macquarie, you're actively connecting with or following people within academia, and you're commenting on topics related to your area of expertise, then your profile would be considered a professional account.

LOOKING TO CREATE A MACQUARIE SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNT?
If you're an academic looking to create a new Macquarie-affiliated social media account for your department, course or research centre, get in touch with the Head of Social Media to find out how you can submit a business case. You can also find more details about developing a business case in our Social Media Toolkit.

Creating a successful social media profile, growing followers and establishing your online brand involves a long-term commitment, so don't be disheartened if you don't see immediate results. It may be better to first concentrate your efforts on one platform. If you do run multiple accounts, your approach to each social media platform should be different: your approach to LinkedIn should not be the same as your approach to Twitter, for example.

TWITTER
What: Twitter is a microblogging and social networking site where people communicate in short, 280-character messages called tweets that can include links, images or videos. The platform is very conversational but moves quickly to keep pace with current news or breaking events.

Why: Twitter is the social media of choice for most academics. It's a powerful platform for sharing research, creating new connections and attracting mainstream media attention – even though it has the smallest audience compared with other social media channels, with 353.1 million monthly active users. Mentions of research on Twitter can also improve Altmetric scores, and this data can be used for promotions and grant applications.

How: Create a Twitter username (also known as a handle) up to 15 characters or fewer. We recommend that you use your name rather than a pseudonym so that you're easily searchable. We also suggest not including academic titles because if you're promoted, you'll have to change your username and any mentions of your old name will no longer be linked to your account. You can also include a link to your Pure profile in your Twitter bio, which is useful as other users may want to find out more about you and your research output.

On Twitter, you can follow people to see their content in your feed. You can also tag the handles of other researchers or key contributors in your field by using the @ symbol in your own posts, use hashtags (#) to join topical conversations, or start your own share longer messages by starting a Twitter thread, or tag tweets with a location.

PROFESSOR CULUM BROWN
MARINE BIOLOGIST AND HEAD OF THE FISH LAB

“Twitter is a beast to keep track of. There is so much going on that you really have to set yourself limits and decide how best to engage when you do. I tend to have a few key themes in terms of my engagement. One is fishy stuff in general, one is shark specific and the other is big environmental/conservation type themes (for example, climate change).

My posts take a couple of formats. Firstly, I re-post a lot of job and PhD opportunities from my network – this is a bit of community service. The other posts are mostly about things that are currently in the news or topical in some way. For example, a new paper released by the Fish Lab that has broad public interest or something that is trending in the news media (such as shark nets or fish welfare).

I often frame my tweets as a question or try to be a bit provocative. Ideally, they should be accompanied by good quality images, although I don't always have time to do that. You also need to be tweeting regularly in an attempt to stay current.”

Follow Professor Culum Brown on Twitter, and the Fish Lab.
FACEBOOK

**What:** Facebook is a social networking site that makes it easy for users to connect and share with family and friends online through a variety of content, such as photos and status updates. With more than 2.7 billion monthly active users, Facebook is the biggest social network worldwide. Even though people tend to use Facebook for personal rather than professional reasons, it can also be an effective outreach tool for academics through groups or pages.

**Why:** Unlike LinkedIn and Twitter, it’s less beneficial for academics to set up a professional profile on Facebook, as it’s likely that your feed would be a mix of personal and work-related posts. However, Facebook is a useful platform for academics to find a community as you can follow associations, societies or groups related to your research topic – either a specific research group (typically a closed group) or people with similar interests (typically an open group). Other useful functions include the events feature, which can be used to publicise events or conferences, or the Facebook Live (video) function to talk about a specific interest or topic in real time.

**How:** You need to have a Facebook profile in order to join a group, but the benefit is that you don’t need to be a ‘friend’ in order to become a group member, so your personal profile can remain private.

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PROFESSOR NICK TITOV
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF MINDSPOT AT MQ HEALTH

“I am not a natural social media user, so using LinkedIn has involved a steep learning curve. I sought advice about my profile and about how to get started posting messages. I now try to schedule making regular posts, and I keep a list of things that I plan to share, which include posts about our own work or significant developments in the field, including others’ work. I don’t spend much time on LinkedIn and avoid the hype of trying to compete for attention. But, overall, LinkedIn has helped me to build a professional social media profile and stay abreast of key issues in my field.”

Connect with Professor Nick Titov on LinkedIn

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DR LAUREN GORFINKEL
DEPARTMENT OF MEDIA, COMMUNICATIONS, CREATIVE ARTS, LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

“I have found the Social Media Professor’s Facebook Group, run by Dr Karen Freberg (University of Louisville), extremely useful for connecting with other social media educators around the world for both research and teaching purposes. There are currently over 2000 members, who ask questions, openly share their approaches to assessment, and share the latest social media news that might be interesting to discuss in class. It has helped me to ensure the tasks I set for students are world class, has been a source of guest speakers, and has helped me connect with other academics for publishing opportunities. I found this group following a recommendation from another social media educator I connected with after reviewing her book.”

Connect with Dr Lauren Gorfinkel in the Social Media Professor’s Facebook Group
INSTAGRAM
What: Instagram is a popular photo and video-sharing social networking site owned by Facebook, which has 1.2 billion monthly active users. Instagram is a visual platform, so it’s extremely important that pictures are aesthetically appealing and of high quality.

Why: Instagram is not an obvious choice of social media platform for academics, as users tend to engage with strong visual content rather than academic content. However, with 18- to 29-year-olds making up the largest demographic on Instagram, it can be a useful tool for academics trying to engage teenagers or young adults with their research. You can post an image or video to your feed, share short video clips on Instagram Stories (these last 24 hours) or share longer videos on IGTV (up 60 minutes). You can also find people to follow or discover new topics with hashtags (such as #AcademicLife or #PhDLife), or through Explore.

How: To create a profile, use a discoverable name, upload a recognisable photo for your profile picture and fill out the 150 character bio. You can also include a website link, such as your Pure profile or research webpage.

YOUTUBE
What: YouTube is an online video-sharing platform where you can watch, like and comment on videos or upload your own. The platform has two billion monthly active users. Videos that educate and inspire drive high engagement with audiences, with more than a billion learning-related videos viewed on YouTube every day. YouTube is also a useful platform for academics looking to find content that is relevant to their teaching and allows you to subscribe to your favourite channels.

Why: Academics can increase awareness of their research by creating teaching videos (such as ‘edutainment’ videos that combine education with entertainment or ‘how to’ videos on how to master a specific subject), or videos providing commentary on current issues and topics. If you’re considering launching a YouTube channel, we recommend that you have a niche focus area as this is the best way to build an engaged community.

How: Anyone can watch YouTube videos, but you need a YouTube channel to upload videos or post comments. You’ll firstly need a Google account to create a YouTube channel. It’s worth noting that you can only upload videos that are up to 15 minutes long – if you want to upload videos longer than 15 minutes, you need to have a verified account.

DR VANESSA PIROTTA
WILDLIFE SCIENTIST AND SCIENCE COMMUNICATOR
“Social media is an incredible free tool to help supplement your role as an academic. It allows you to provide informative communication about your work in a way that you feel comfortable. It is also about keeping your message simple and being creative. Think about the messages you want to provide and the types of audiences you would like to target. I’ve found social media a powerful tool for science communication, which has allowed me to share my research internationally to both a scientific and non-scientific audience. Instagram is one of my favourite platforms as it is visual. I love being able to use images to support my research message.”

Follow Dr Vanessa Pirotta on Twitter and Instagram

SCIENCE COMMUNICATION TIPS FROM DR VANESSA PIROTTA

TIP: MAKE YOUR MENTIONS COUNT
When posting about your research on social media, make sure you include a hyperlink to at least one of the following. You can also ask a journalist to include a link in an online story about your research. These links are tracked by systems like Altmetrics, Elsevier, Lexis Nexus and Clarivate media trackers. It also makes it easier for people to find the research from original source.

• A link to the DOI URL
  http://dx.doi.org/10.7326/0003-4819-158-11-201306040-00002

• A link to the journal article URL from the publisher website
  http://annals.org/article.aspx?articleid=1691733

• A link to the PubMed version of the article

• A link to the article on arXiv
  http://arxiv.org/abs/1409.2251

Be careful of link shorteners as they may not work with some of these tracking systems.

For more information about Altmetric visit the Library website.
Responding to requests from the media

Journalists work to tight deadlines, so when you get a call from a journalist or producer, often you’ll have only a short time to decide whether or not to accept an interview opportunity. Asking some key questions while you’re on the call with them will help you weigh up the benefits and make an informed decision.

**QUESTIONS TO ASK**
- Who is the journalist and which media outlet are they from?
- What story are they working on? What’s their angle?
- What are they looking for from you?
- Who else have they spoken to?
- What kind of interview do they want (e.g., live on air or pre-recorded) and for how long?
- What is their deadline?

If you can, tell them what time you’ll call them back within their deadline, to give yourself some time to prepare. If anything about the interview raises concerns for you – for instance, if you haven’t heard of the media outlet or the story sounds particularly controversial – tell the journalist you’ll call them back and do some quick research, or get in contact with the Macquarie media team to discuss.

It’s fine to turn down an interview request. If it’s outside your area of research expertise or you’re not confident or prepared to speak on the topic, it’s better to politely decline and recommend a Macquarie colleague or refer the journalist back to the media team for a recommendation. If the journalist is asking for comment on behalf of the University, always refer them back to the media team.

Even if you have not done research on the exact topic the journalist is looking for comment on, you may still be able to provide the type of commentary they’re looking for – just be clear about what areas of the topic you can speak about. If you’re unavailable at the time, you can ask to do the interview at a different day or time, but be prepared that they may drop the story.

**JANA BOWDEN’S TIP:**

“**STICK TO YOUR KNITTING**

“As they say ‘know when to hold ’em and know when to fold ’em’. One key tip in communicating with the media is to stay in your comfort zone – your own knowledge lanes of expertise. If you stick to the areas and topics that you know well, that you passionately believe in, and that you feel offer your audience value, then you will always communicate easily, naturally and authentically because you are doing what you do best. Don’t be afraid to turn down an opportunity if you feel that it does not sit within your lane of expertise, and don’t be afraid to say so. The media will appreciate your honesty.”

**Associate Professor Jana Bowden, Department of Marketing**

**THE PRE-INTERVIEW**

Journalists are unlikely to be familiar with your topic area, and especially for broadcast interviews, the producer may want to conduct a pre-interview before they record the real thing. This is a chance to educate them briefly on the topic and potentially influence the types of questions they’ll ask. Generally, journalists will not give you a list of questions in advance of an interview, so use this time to find out as much as you can about their line of enquiry. Often, journalists will contact different universities looking for an appropriate expert on the topic of their story. They’ll be looking for the person who is most articulate, knowledgeable and media-friendly, so take this step seriously.
PREPARING FOR A MEDIA INTERVIEW
Preparation is key to feeling confident and comfortable in a media interview, and to getting your information across in an effective way. The media are looking for your expert opinion and generally aren’t looking to trip you up with their questions, but being prepared will help you make the most of the opportunity and be ready for any tough questions. Interviews should be a mutually beneficial exercise – the journalist is using your expert opinion to build an interesting and credible story, and you have the chance to represent yourself and the University in a positive way.

Pre-prepare: It’s worthwhile building up a resource of interview material in advance of any actual interview request, so that you can respond quickly when you need to. Write down all the possible questions that you could be asked, from the most straightforward informational request through to the most controversial or confronting. Try to think like a journalist. If you were an interviewer, what would you ask to generate the most interesting story possible for your viewers, listeners, readers or editor? Then you can start collecting information, facts and figures and examples, and formulating straightforward answers to the types of questions you might be asked.

Stay on point: Decide on your agenda for the interview, and prepare three to four key messages that you want to communicate to the public. It can be difficult to condense years of research into a few concise sentences suitable for media, and you may be afraid that some nuance will be lost. The messages need to be concise and able to be understood by a broad audience, so don’t get bogged down in the details – instead, consider the most important points that you want to highlight.

Practice out loud: Refine your messages by practicing them out loud (ideally with a friend or colleague, or in front of a mirror). You don’t want to sound too rehearsed, but being familiar with your messages will help you get your point across efficiently and stay on track if the interview goes off in an unexpected direction. It can also be useful to record yourself to assess your performance.

Understand the context: Do a search for recent media coverage on the topic. Find out who are the key people or organisations speaking in the media, what they’ve been saying and any key issues or controversies the media will be likely to focus on. Consider how your expertise fits into this topic, and try to think of the likely questions that the journalist will ask in relation to current events and how you’ll respond to the questions using your key messages.

Keep the audience in mind: Generally, media interviews are for a non-specialist audience, so make sure your communication style is relevant for the general public and avoid jargon, acronyms and complex terms. If it’s for a trade or special-interest publication, consider who the audience for that outlet would be and what their interests or concerns are. If it’s mainstream media, think about what an average grandparent or next-door neighbour would care about and identify the broadly relatable aspects of your topic.

Who’s asking the questions: Do some background research on the journalist and the media outlet to see what they’ve published before on this topic and their general political slant. They may publish straightforward balanced news or have strong views or an agenda that you should be aware of. This will help you prepare for any curly questions. If it’s a broadcast interview, listen to some previous episodes of the program to understand the tone – are the questions light-hearted or hard-hitting?
INTERVIEW TIPS

QUESTIONS AS OPPORTUNITIES
Don’t wait for the interviewer to ask you the perfect question to bring out your key messages. You might only be asked a few questions. Weave these into your answers from the start. Answer their question, but first, use the opportunity to incorporate your message. You don’t need to do this for every question, and you don’t want to continually repeat your messages where it doesn’t make sense to do so – but it can be a very useful and persuasive technique.

For example, instead of:
Q: “How deadly is this disease?”
A: “The disease is fatal in around 20 per cent of cases.”

The alternative might be:
Q: “How deadly is this disease?”
A: “Our research team at Macquarie University is currently recruiting participants for a world-first study into this disease. Early indicators suggest the disease is fatal in around 20 per cent of cases.”

JANA BOWDEN’S TIP: THE IMPORTANCE OF PRESENCE

“Presence helps you as a communicator get out of your own head, to actively think about what you are saying and to connect with your audience whoever they may be. You want your audience to understand your message and to come away thinking I am now armed with insights and tools that I didn’t have before. The goal isn’t to show how much you know. The goal is to leave the audience, whoever they may be, with an idea or an insight to mull over, or an action to take.

The best mindset when engaging in media is to show up ready to give passionately, to share and to not expect something in return whether it be approval, networks or further opportunities. Just go in ready and willing to give.”

Associate Professor Jana Bowden, Department of Marketing

Keep it concise
Remember that your comments are likely to be heavily cut down for print or pre-recorded broadcast interviews, so to avoid being selectively quoted, keep your answers concise and don’t waffle.

On or off the record
Be aware that interpretations of on and off the record may vary. The simplest approach is to assume that everything is on the record – this includes anything you say to the journalist, even at an informal meeting or before or after the interview.

You’re still on air
Don’t make tongue-in-cheek or satirical comments before the interview begins. Remember, your entire time with the journalist is the interview. When the formal interview concludes, remain seated and don’t make any comments other than a general ‘thank you’. The cameras may still be on you and the microphones may be open.

Curveballs
If you’re hit with a tough question, it’s important not to get defensive or negative, or to be led down a path of questioning that you’re not comfortable with. The interview can quickly go off course if a journalist asks misleading or ill-informed questions, or veers away from the original topic. Use some of these methods to keep the interview on track.

• The question or interruption may raise a valid or interesting issue – this needs to be acknowledged, but you can use a bridging phrase to return to your main point and turn it into a positive.

FOR EXAMPLE:

A: “We’ve found that shark deterrents are killing a large number of sharks every year.”

Q: “Are you saying that we should preference sharks’ lives over humans?”

A: “Preventing shark attacks is an incredibly important issue, and what our research is focused on is finding what methods are most effective and safe for deterring sharks from our beaches.”

Other useful bridging phrases include: “I would not say that, but what I would say is ...”, “Great question, but what’s most important for listeners to know ...”, “What our research shows is ...” But only use phrases that feel natural and authentic to you.

• Be careful not to overuse the bridging technique as it can sound evasive. You can also try reframing the question into a more positive one before responding.

• Don’t try to talk over the interviewer if they interrupt. Stop speaking, let them ask their question and then give your response.

• If you don’t know the answer to a question, or if it’s totally out of your area of expertise, say so.

• For example: “That’s outside the scope of my research expertise” or “I’m not an expert in that area, but what we’ve found is ...”

• Don’t repeat inaccurate information or inflammatory language from their question in your answer. If you take the bait, negative or inaccurate words could then be attributed to you.

• For example, if asked “What do you think of this disastrous new policy?”

• Don’t say: “I wouldn’t call it disastrous, but ...”

• Do say: “The new policy makes some important changes, but ...”

• Don’t try to hide difficult or controversial aspects of your research or the topic (and don’t say ‘no comment’), but take the initiative to put them in a positive context. Establish a significantly greater positive first, then address the problem.

MINIMISING SYMPTOMS OF STRESS
Adequate preparation should help you feel less anxious, but nerves are normal before and during the interview.

• Be aware of your particular stress reactions so they don’t take you by surprise. Do you get a dry mouth? Perspire a lot? Develop neck or back tension? Rehearsing interviews with a colleague may help identify your reactions, so you can counteract them for the real thing.

• Be prepared to use the privacy of a toilet or a dressing room to do simple stretching and breathing exercises to release muscular tension.

• Avoid alcohol. Don’t eat for half an hour or so before the interview and avoid hot drinks just before it. Coffee in particular often leaves a nagging urge to clear the throat. Ensure that you have a couple of sips of water just before the interview begins and, if doing an onstage or radio interview, have a glass of water nearby in case you really need it.
BEST PRACTICE FOR TV, RADIO, PRINT AND ONLINE

TV
TV interviews are usually the most nerve-racking type for new media commentators – especially if they’re live to air. You may be asked to go into the studio, they may send a camera crew to you or the interview might take place over Skype or Zoom.

TV news and current affairs are generally short and succinct, and use images to tell the story, so you’ll need to make sure your messages are extra clear and concise as they are likely to be edited down. Express yourself in full sentences so that they make sense if edited into a standalone clip. If you are on a talk-style program, such as morning TV, you can be more relaxed and chatty in your tone, but keep your answers to the point, lively and interesting.

If there is anything you’re unsure about in terms of TV protocols, don’t be afraid to ask the producer.

- **What to wear:** TV producers don’t generally expect academics to look particularly corporate or slick, but you’ll want to choose comfortable, relatively conservative clothing. Avoid small stripes or patterns (they cause a strobing effect), black or bright white, green (in case of a green screen behind you), scarves (or anything else around your neck that will brush the microphone), distracting earrings or bold accessories. A jacket or blazer is always a good idea. They may put some make-up on you if you go into the studio, but you can do your own – at least powder to avoid looking shiny.

- **Where to look:** Don’t look directly at the camera. Look at the interviewer. Try to keep your head steady while you’re talking, as often the shot will be cropped close around your face.

- **What to do with your hands:** Using some small hand gestures can help you look animated, but keep them restrained, and if you tend to be very expressive with your hands, you can keep them folded in your lap or on the desk if you’re seated around a table. Try not to fidget and minimise touching your face.

- **How to act:** Being on camera is not natural for most people, but try to breathe slowly, relax as much as possible and inject your enthusiasm for the topic into your voice. Recording yourself will help you refine your demeanour – do you need to slow down or amp up your energy? Some people when nervous end up with a frozen smile. It’s fine to smile, frown and be expressive with your face, but make it appropriate to the context. Try to enjoy yourself and this opportunity to share your knowledge with a huge audience.

**TIPS FOR SKYPE OR ZOOM INTERVIEWS**

- Find a quiet spot to do the interview where you won’t be disturbed.
- Sit facing a window or other light source.
- Make sure the camera is at eye level – not looking up or down at you.
- Choose a neutral tidy backdrop or a bookshelf.
- Use an external microphone if possible to improve sound quality.
- Test your camera and microphone beforehand.
- Avoid rocking from side to side, if you’re sitting in a swivel chair.
- Look straight at the camera not at yourself on the screen.
- Make sure your internet connection is working well.

FILMING ON CAMPUS

If a TV crew wants to come to Macquarie’s campus to film, permission is needed from the Property team. Contact your communications partner to arrange a suitable location to film, as well as permissions and parking for the crew. Provide at least a few days’ notice if possible to allow time to organise the filming. Some spaces at the University (e.g. laboratories) require special permissions.

**Radio and podcasts**

Although your appearance is one less thing to think about for radio, you’ll need to convey your authority and confidence through your voice alone.

If the interview is over the phone, use a landline rather than a mobile if possible, and find a quiet place to do the interview.

Smile and gesture as if you were on camera to help enliven your voice. Try to be descriptive and illustrative in your words, as there won’t be any images to accompany the story. Give interesting examples or anecdotes.

If it’s pre-recorded and you say the wrong thing, ask if you can start your answer again. If you stumble or say the wrong word, correct the word and keep going.

- **Radio news** will be looking for short, punchy grabs to edit into their news package. These will be pre-recorded and edited down, so answer in full sentences and think about ‘sound bites’ that sum up your research or opinion.

- **Radio programs** may be live or pre-recorded, and you’ll have more time to expand on the subject area. Your interview may be edited as part of a package with other interviews or be used standalone. They may even invite talkback callers, in which case be prepared to answer questions and respond to anecdotes from the general public.

- **Podcasts** can take many formats – news style or longer conversational-type podcasts should be treated the same as pre-recorded radio interviews.

**Print and online**

Interviews for print and online media can be more relaxed than broadcast, and you may be able to go into a bit more depth. They’ll likely publish some of your comments, so don’t be too long-winded and only say what you’re happy to see in print or in a headline. You usually won’t get a chance to review the final article. Make sure the journalist has understood your meaning. If you feel that you mis spoke, you can call the journalist back and correct yourself.

Sometimes, journalists will ask for written responses to their questions for a print or online article. This means you can carefully craft your responses. Still keep them as concise as possible, remember your audience and think about what will make a good short quote (the journalist is unlikely to use more than a couple of your sentences).
MEDIA AND SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDE FOR ACADEMICS

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE MEDIA
The Macquarie media team has outstanding relationships and connections with media. If the media team helps set up an initial interview opportunity for you, keep the journalist’s details on file. Many journalists for mainstream media outlets cover general news. If they have a particular interest in your topic area or if they are a specialist reporter with a ‘round’ (topic that they report on) or from a trade publication that aligns closely to your area of expertise, you may want to maintain a relationship with them so that you can pitch an idea to them at a later date.

A FEW SIMPLE WAYS TO BUILD A PROFESSIONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH A JOURNALIST

Follow up
After an article is published or your interview airs, send a note thanking them for the opportunity and complimenting them on the story, if appropriate. Share it on your social media. If they expressed any interest in any of your upcoming research, let them know that you’ll share it with them as you get closer to the publication date.

Get to know their work
Keep an eye on what journalists are reporting on, their style and interests. When it comes to pitching a potential story, you’ll be sure they haven’t already covered it. For the work that you found interesting, share it on your social media and tag them.

Follow them on social media
Twitter is the best social network to interact with journalists. If you’re on Twitter, follow them, retweet or comment on their work that interests you. Sometimes reporters will crowdsource stories in social media – which might give you an opportunity to offer yourself as an expert commentator.

Understand their job
Most journalists are extremely busy and have multiple competing deadlines for stories. Don’t bombard them with pitches or waste their time. If you’re going to pitch a story, it’s often best to do this via email, or if you’re going to call them, make sure it’s at a convenient time and not at 4pm when they’re writing against the clock, or just before their program is about to air. Don’t be offended if they don’t respond or are not interested in the story. Journalists get countless pitches every day, and it doesn’t mean that your research isn’t interesting or worthy. Sometimes the timing might be off or a bigger story has come up.

Don’t get too friendly
Journalists might be friendly, but treat them as fellow professionals and remember that everything is on the record.

COPING WITH A SUDDEN WAVE OF MEDIA INTEREST
Your groundbreaking research has been published, and you’ve put the finishing touches on a media release – and then all of a sudden, your phone won’t stop ringing. Things move quickly in the news cycle, and if there’s a great story, multiple outlets are likely to want to report on it that same day.

The best approach to this situation is to be prepared.

• **Be available:** If the media is interested in the story now, you may need to work to their schedule to make the most of the opportunity before they move on. Clear your schedule as much as possible on the day your paper will be published, and let the media team know your availability so that they can communicate this to the media.

• **Divide and conquer:** If you have multiple authors on your paper, decide who will be the spokesperson or how you will split up the interviews in advance.

• **Prepare FAQs:** Write out answers to the most obvious questions that you are likely to be asked. This will save you time responding to requests from print or online media, where you may be able to give them written responses to their questions and allow you to hone concise responses for TV or radio.

• **Prioritise:** Accept that you may not be able to respond to every interview request, and decide on the outlets or programs that are most important to you. Discuss this with your communications partner in advance, as they can advise our media team to pitch the story to specific producers or journalists. However, don’t accept an interview request and then later cancel because you’ve got a better offer. If this happens, try to negotiate with the second outlet to do the interview at a different time.
What if something goes wrong in media or on social?

Working with the media requires a lot of time and effort, and there are risks involved. Some academics are concerned that their research findings may be exaggerated or their comments taken out of context. Understanding how the media works and how to communicate your work effectively will minimise these risks.

CONTROVERSIAL RESEARCH

If you publish research that’s likely to be controversial, even if you don’t want to actively promote it, it’s best to be prepared in case journalists see it and want to report on it.

We recommend that you alert your communications partner, who will advise the media team who manage calls from the media.

You may consider:

• preparing a statement to use in case the research is picked up
• preparing a Q&A for the most likely questions journalists will have
• practicing answering difficult questions with a colleague or your communications partner.

It’s best not to ignore the media if they do get in contact with you. Often with controversial research, journalists will ask other academics what they think of the findings, so it’s better to have your voice in the story too. You can even consider recommending to the journalist critics of your work – critics whose opposing views you respect and who you know will give considered commentary.

BEING MISQUOTED/NOT HAPPY WITH THE ARTICLE

• Keeping your answers brief and to the point will avoid the journalist cherrypicking part of the quote that you don’t like.
• If you have truly been misquoted or there is a major error in an online article, you can contact the journalist and politely request that they correct it.
• If you’re not happy with the angle they have taken or that the focus of the article is elsewhere, unfortunately there is not much to be done. However, by doing your homework before the interview, you should have a better idea of what the article is likely to be.
• If you believe the article to be damaging or defamatory, contact your communications partner for further advice.

ONLINE SAFETY

While social media has many tremendous benefits for academics, it can also come with negative experiences, ranging from mild criticism to persistent trolling. Social media audiences both consume content and participate in its creation, meaning a negative issue can evolve and develop based on the contributions of others that may or may not have any factual basis.

To stay safe on social media, we recommend following these three steps.

1. Ignore it: The first thing to determine is whether you want to take action. As a general rule, genuine negative feedback should not be deleted; it’s far better to respond positively and constructively with facts. However, if someone does criticise you or your work online, the best response is often not to respond at all. Trolls often try to create a reaction online simply because they want attention themselves.

2. Report it: If the comments are abusive, inflammatory or harassing, you should block or ban the user and report the abuse via the social media platform where it was posted or shared:
   - Facebook
   - Instagram
   - LinkedIn
   - Twitter
   - YouTube

It’s also advisable to take a screenshot of the comment so that you have a permanent record. If threats are made online, or if the posts are damaging to your reputation as an academic or to the University, you should contact the communications team who can provide further advice.

3. Seek support: You can also make a report or seek additional support by contacting your Head of Department and the HR Client Team. If possible, provide a screenshot. If you require further support, Macquarie staff have access to free resources through the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) provided by Benestar, such as confidential counselling, coaching and wellbeing service. You can call Benestar on 1300 360 364 or find more information on the webpage.

We also encourage staff to use the eSafety’s cyber abuse response guide, which outlines skills and strategies for responding to cyber abuse.

Macquarie staff are also reminded of their rights and responsibilities when engaging on social media, in their capacity as an employee of the University, to safeguard their reputation and that of the University. This covers areas such as speaking only on areas of expertise and never posting malicious or unlawful comments online. For more information, see the Social Media Policy.
Contacts and resources

INTERNAL RESOURCES
MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY COMMUNICATIONS AND MEDIA TEAM
T: (02) 9850 6766
E: communications@mq.edu.au

MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY SOCIAL MEDIA TEAM
E: socialmedia@mq.edu.au

EXTERNAL RESOURCES
AUSTRALIAN SCIENCE MEDIA CENTRE: SCIENCE MEDIA SAVVY
sciencemedia.savvy.org