Working with the Media

Julie Van Scoy, CNR Communications Director

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Why Work with the Media?

You can help tell stories that build public support for front-line research.

You can shape your message, meaning, and emphasis rather than having others do that for you.

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Why Work with the Media?

- Communicate with CA taxpayers
- Raise profile of UCB, College, program, field, and YOU
- Reporters return to sources who help them—you may need to work with them to share results of your own research.
- Help reporters get the story RIGHT. Contributing to accurate science reporting benefits your field, your own research, and science in general.

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What Is News? Or, ”So, what?”

- Superlatives: the first, the fastest, the largest, the oldest, unique? Change or challenge to status quo thinking?

- A new finding on a highly public-facing topic (e.g., cancer, food safety, obesity, other key public health issues).
- Timing – does it coincide with bigger or ”hot” story? (ex: Zika)
- Science news is normally focused on findings, BUT a novel experiment can be newsworthy.
- Awards in the multimillions, major prizes.
- Alters or advances our understanding of the topic in question and in a way that is relevant to public

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Berkeley News Research People Campus & comm

MIND & BODY, RESEARCH

Wealth of unsuspected new microbes expands tree of life

By Robert Sanders, Media relations | APRIL 11, 2016

The tree of life, which depicts how life has evolved and diversified on the planet, is getting a lot more complicated.

Researchers at UC Berkeley, who have discovered more than 1,000 new types of bacteria and Archaea over the past 15 years lurking in Earth's nooks and crannies, have dramatically rejiggered the tree to account for these microscopic new life forms.

Wildfires emit more greenhouse gases than assumed in state climate targets

April 16, 2015

A new study quantifying the amount of carbon stored and released through California forests and wildlands finds that wildfires and deforestation are contributing more than expected to the state's greenhouse gas emissions.

UC Berkeley to lead new $25M nuclear science...

February 5, 2016

Feeling smug about your solar rooftop? Not so fast

January 22, 2016

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Less "Newsworthy"

Not as Much

- Not novel, e.g.: University Gives Course! Department has 17th anniversary, Researcher gets $10,000 grant! Employee of the Month
- A breakthrough, but so technical only other scientists care about it.
- Something that has been covered extensively in recent or other iterations

But consider other channels

- Department or lab website. Your personal site
- Feature stories (esp. if there is good human interest)
- Social Media (esp if a strong image or video. Fieldwork is great)

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Scenarios for Media Interviews

1. Story on your study findings

1. Expert commentary on topic in your research area

1. Hot seat/Conflict (disputed findings, controversies)

HOME SEARCH

The New York Times

Researchers Aim to Put Carbon Dioxide Back to Work

THE SCIENCE OF FAT

After 'The Biggest Loser,' Their Bodies Fought to Regain Weight

After a Comeback, New Challenges for Yellowstone's Grizzly Bears

Scientists Unveil New 'Tree of Life'

By CARL ZIMMER APRIL 11, 2016

A team of scientists unveiled a new tree of life on Monday, a diagram outlining the evolution of all living things. The researchers found that bacteria make up most of life's branches. And they found that much of that diversity has been waiting in plain sight to be discovered, dwelling in river mud and meadow soils.

"It is a momentous discovery — an entire continent of life-forms," said Eugene V. Koonin of the National Center for Biotechnology Information, who was not involved in the study.

The study was published in the journal Nature Microbiology.

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When a Reporter Calls

Get information about the reporter.

- *Name, media outlet, phone, deadline?*

Get information about the story.

- *Is the story premise correct? Are you the right source, or can you recommend a better one?*

OK to tell them you'll call back.

- *Take time to collect your thoughts—but note their deadlines. They often put out multiple calls for experts.*

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Preparing for an Interview

- Create a key message – an overarching idea that can be expressed simply, in one or two sentences.
- They are looking for short quotes/soundbytes
- General Audience: How would you explain this to someone in a bar?
- What questions to you expect? What is the one question you wouldn't want to be asked?

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Preparing for an Interview

Message Examples:

- Drought is changing wildlife behavior in the West, and humans must understand and adjust.
- New user-friendly website uses California climate change data available to help practitioners, policymakers, and the public make informed decision about land use, water use, and other public policies.
- This is the first study to show citizen science data collection is as viable as professionally collected data.

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Preparing for an Interview

Establish context/relevance: What is the societal or scientific problem the research addresses? It can be as simple as:

- Integrating renewables into the grid poses a fundamentally new problem.(*specific problem statement)*
- Our climate is changing more rapidly that any time recorded in human history. *(larger-scale context)*
- One in three Americans is obese. *(Power fact)*
- Maps used be drawn by hand. Not any more! *(Cultural context)*

Delivering Your Message

- Say it simply. Avoid or define jargon and technical terms.
- Avoid getting bogged down in long explanations.
- Make your point and stop. Resist the urge to fill pauses.

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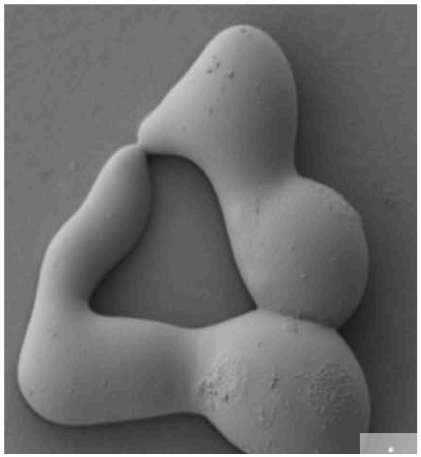
Examples and Analogies

Non-scientists can understand very sophisticated concepts if they are provided with a familiar idea or specific example they can latch onto.

The secret language of microbes

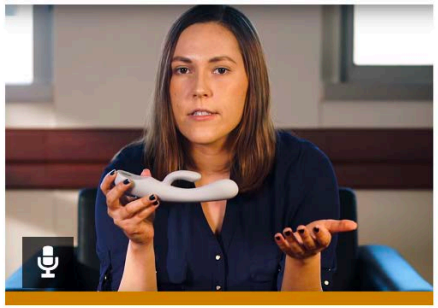
April 15, 2016 | By Robert Sanders, UC Berkeley Media relations



Fungi communicate by chemical signals only, but they, like humans, appear to use different dialects.

This discovery came from a UC Berkeley study of the filamentous fungus *Neurospora crassa*, a red bread mold that has been studied in the laboratory for nearly 100 years.

Many fungi, including *N. crassa*, grow as filaments or hyphae that often fuse to form an interconnected network. Hyphal networks have been shown to be important to many fungi, including the mycorrhizal fungi that form associations with plant roots, sharing nutrients.



Like GPS, but for your sex drive

February 11, 2016

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Print Journalists

- Be ready to support your message with a few examples and facts.
- Practice talking through questions you anticipate
- Don't expect to see a copy of the article before published
- Beware of throwaway comments

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Broadcast Interviews

Ask about format

-Live? Sound byte for package story? Location?

- Be positive, calm, courteous and enthusiastic.
- Remember your audience – you are talking to the public, not your peers. Use colloquial language and avoid jargon, acronyms or long titles.
- Don't use the interviewer's name as it can sound overly familiar.
- Don't fall for the interviewer's pregnant pause encouraging you to carry on.
- Avoid 'ums' and 'ahs'.
- Drink water beforehand

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Broadcast Interviews (cont.)

Voice and appearance are part of the message

- Comb hair, dress neatly (e.g.tailored jackets, simple colors rather than patterns), wear make up
- Talk in conversational tone – don't be overly animated with tone, facial expression, or body language
- Lock in eye contact with the interviewer don't look at the camera or let your eyes wonder off.
- Sound authoritative: Deliver answers with confidence. Avoid ending sentences on an up note.
- Avoid swaying. Stand with one foot slightly in front of the other.
- Avoid relaxing until told to – camera or mic may still be on

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Rephrasing the Question

Help create a great quote/soundbite by rephrasing the question at the start of your answer:

- Allows easier integration into text, editing of audio

"Why should we rethink fire suppression as a forest management technique?"

"Because if a fire occurs it will easily find a path to…"
vs. "We should reconsider fire suppression as a widespread forest management technique because…"

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Controversial Issues

Even if you do not wish to actively promote the research, it is still possible that journalists will pick up on the research and wish to report it. Be prepared!

- Reach out to media contacts at UCB, CNR for advice or to come up with talking points.
- If you have a study on a controversial topic coming out, consider preparing a reactive press release
- Prepare background/FAQ materials
- You don't have to comment. But consider how doing so (vs. stonewalling) may be to your advantage.

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Staying on Message

Make notes to help you stay in track (not for video)

Beware of loaded questions.

- *"Isn't it true that…"*

Don't accept false facts or incorrect interpretations.

- *–Politely correct misstatements—NEVER be defensive, combative, or condescending.*

The art of bridging: Redirect the conversation to stay on topic and accurate.

- *–There isn't a simple answer to that, but what's important to remember is…"*

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Staying on Message

It's OK to say, "I don't know."

- *Resist the urge to answer something just because it was asked.*

It's OK to start over and rephrase your answer.

- *"I think I can explain a little better…"*
- *Reporters want strong, clear quotes so they are happy to oblige.*

Avoid saying "No comment"

- It OK to say, "That's too far outside my expertise for me to comment as an authority."

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UC Berkeley Platforms

Our owned-media ecosystem:

- UCB or CNR press release (give as much notice as possible)
- Web news item
- *Breakthroughs Magazine*
- *California Magazine*
- UCANR blogs
- UCB or CNR social media
- Berkeley Blog
- Department website

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Social Media

- People are more likely to read and trust stories when they come from a known source.
- Social media can exist in its own right or amplify stories in other media.
- Quality vs. quantity: High-value followers can be just as good as quantity.
- Tailor your message for each platform.

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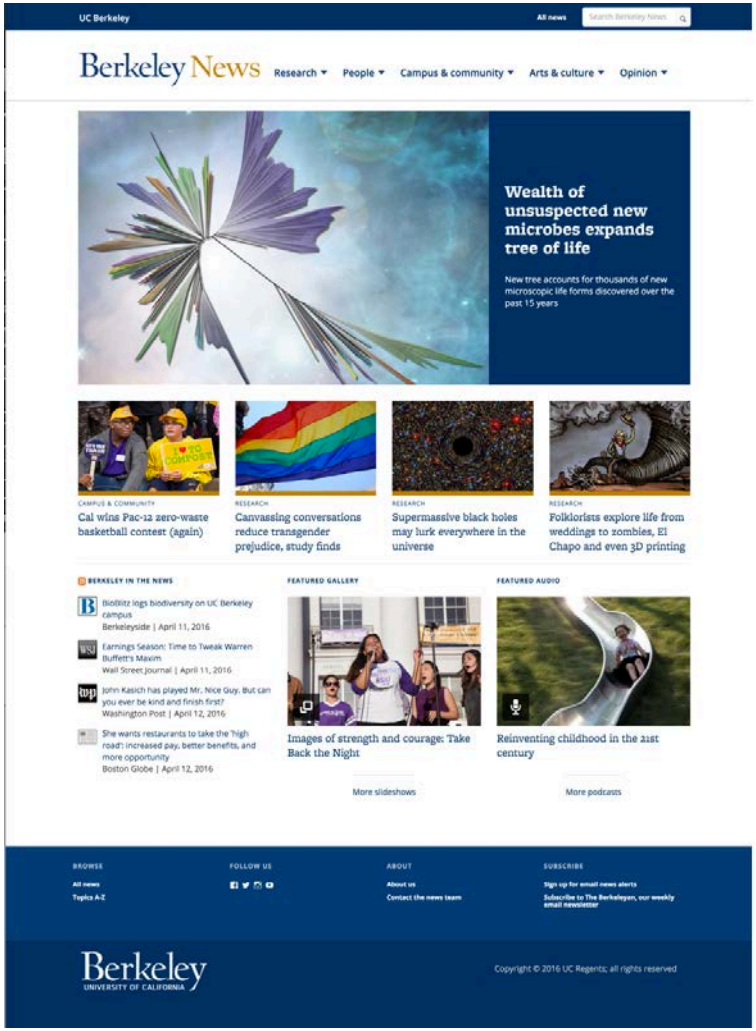
Think Visual

- Websites trend toward featuring images
- Social media posts do better with photos or video
- Your work is visual even if you don't think it is!



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Visual Storytelling

You can't go back! (Usually)

Document your research with:

- Photos
- Videos
- Consider graphs, visualizations, infographics, illustrations
- In the field or lab can be part of the story

Take high resolution for print

Record details: locations and names of people in your photos. Get their permission to share and post!

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Q & A

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