



The British Association of
Sport and Exercise Sciences

Guidelines for Communicating with the Media

August 2010

1. Introduction

Communicating with the media is an effective way of bringing your research to the attention of the general public. The purpose of this document is to explain the mechanisms that The British Association of Sport and Exercise Sciences (BASES) use to publicise your work as well as to provide you with some advice that will help you prepare for any subsequent contact you might have with the media.

Many researchers find communicating with the media to be an intimidating process but with adequate preparation it can be an enjoyable experience and one of the most effective ways for disseminating research findings that are of public interest or importance.

2. Press Releases

If BASES has contacted you about generating a press release it is because your work is considered to be of particular interest to the media and the general public. The primary way in which BASES brings your work to the attention of various media organisations is by making a press release.

The press release is usually written to appeal to the widest media audience, but sometimes can be worded to target a particular publication or media outlet. In both instances the press release acts as a 'hook' to generate interest in your work and is consequently written in quite a different style to conventional scientific communications.

If you are asked to convert your work into a press release it is important to explain your findings in everyday language that the general public can readily understand. Specialist scientific terminology should be avoided and there should be a clear 'take home message' that perhaps explains the broader importance or applied significance of the work.

You should also include a 2-3 line biography, your contact details and a photograph of yourself. A photograph showing the research study also helps generate interest among the media.

Once the press release has been issued, the media may attempt to contact you either directly or via BASES. It is important that you respond to their request as quickly as possible, especially in those instances where they have requested an interview. It is also important to point out that press releases sometimes fail to generate any interest and it is very difficult to predict what the media are interested in.

3. Preparing for Contact with the Media

There are several ways in which the media may want to communicate with you which could include by email, a telephone interview, a television interview or a press conference. Whatever type of contact you have with the media it is important to prepare properly in order to get your message across effectively.

Understand the Format and Duration: Before you agree to be interviewed or give your opinion make sure you understand the format of media you will be participating in and approximately how long your involvement will be. Email contact is common for newspapers which provides you with a better opportunity to refine and consider your answers.

Interviews can be pre-recorded or live. A pre-recorded interview allows pre-broadcast editing so if you

are unhappy with your answer it is perfectly acceptable to record another attempt. If you asked to participate in a debate make sure you know who you will be debating with as this will help you anticipate questions. Radio interviews can be conducted over the telephone but usually the stations ask for you to travel to a studio quality telephone facility (ISDN line) which most radio stations and Universities have. If you are providing a photograph or you are being recorded for television think carefully about your attire.

Understand the Media Angle: The media usually have a particular angle or agenda that they are working to and it helps if you can understand this before you communicate with them. Often the media contact will explain their perspective to you before they interview you but if they do not then it is a good idea to ask them for their angle beforehand. Sometime the media will want to link your research or ask you opinion about broader issues in the news so it helps to think about this first before giving your views. If you have any doubts about the purpose of the interview always seek clarification beforehand.

Predict Media Questions: A useful way to prepare for media contact is to try and think of questions that they might ask you. Unless you are communicating with specialist media, it is unlikely that you will be asked highly complex questions. Be prepared to answer basic questions about your field as failing to do so can be potentially very embarrassing e.g. Why is the subject important? Why do your findings matter? What is new about your findings? Ideally ask the interviewer what questions they intend to ask you before the interview as this will help you prepare more thoroughly. This is particularly important before a live interview and journalists are accustomed to providing this information.

4. Conducting an Interview

When the time comes to be interviewed try to remain calm and relaxed. Try to prepare immediately before the interview by gathering your thoughts together, controlling your breathing and getting in a comfortable position. The following tips will help you perform well during an interview:

- Always try to speak slowly and clearly. When we are under pressure we tend to speak much faster than we realise so make a conscious effort to control how fast you speak during an interview. Avoid monotone speech and try to come across as enthusiastic about your subject as possible.
- Avoid jargon, profanities, specialist terminology or unnecessarily long replies. Remember you are addressing the general public not your peers, so try to get your point across as succinctly as possible using the simplest language.
- Stay within your area of expertise and resist the temptation to give your opinion on an area that is not within your field. Do not be afraid to decline a question and explain that it is outside your field of knowledge. Remember you are being interviewed as an expert and an ambassador for your subject area which may mean tempering your personal views. If you do give personal views always qualify your answer so the audience can differentiate between scientific fact and personal opinion. As a rule of thumb you should never give an opinion to the media that you would not feel comfortable defending to your peers.

- The best interviews are usually those that are conversational in their nature. Avoid being patronising and resist the temptation to 'lecture'. If you are being interviewed for television, maintain eye contact with the interviewer and avoid looking straight at the camera unless directed to do so.
- Do not breach confidentiality agreements with any of your study participants but instead make general comments and conclusions. Never mention any of your participants by name or describe them in such a way that their identity could be deduced by others.
- Sometimes you will be asked to comment on a person or event in the news. Avoid judging or criticising that person and resist the temptation to interpret their behaviour. Sometimes the media will persist along these lines and the best way to deal with this is to respond by talking in generalities. For instance, if you are asked to explain why a particular footballer always misses penalties, rather than comment on that individual, it would be better to discuss more generally how increased levels of stress can negatively influence performance.

5. BASES Conference Media Arrangements

BASES runs two conferences each year which are the BASES Annual Student Conference and the BASES Annual Conference. The Student Conference is usually two days at the end of March or the beginning of April. The Annual Conference is usually three days at the end of August or the beginning of September.

All press enquiries will be handled by BASES help desk at the student and annual conferences. If your work has been press released it is essential that BASES help desk have a mobile telephone that they can contact you at all times on.

We recommend suggest that if you are attending a presentation that you keep your phone on in silent or vibrate mode. Please respond as quickly as possible to a call because sometimes media representatives will turn up at a conference and will want to speak directly with you. If this is the case we will arrange for a quiet location for you to be interviewed and time for you to prepare. Outside of the conference the media may contact you via BASES office or directly by email.