

## Navigating Press Releases for Papers

### Background:

*What are press releases and why do I need one?*

- Press releases are quick summaries of research projects that allow other members of the media to write full news stories
- In a study of >1600 medical and life science manuscripts across 11 journals, having a press release increased paper downloads by 65%!
- Most universities have a press office - like [The Current](#) for UCSB

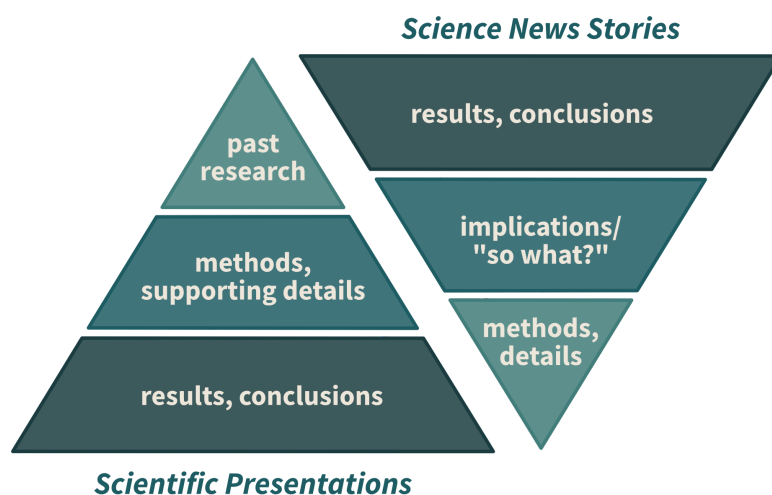
*How do I get started at NCEAS?*

- We have a [google form](#) for press releases for NCEAS working groups/ residents
- Responses will be sent to science writers at the Current, who will follow up with you with any additional questions, interview requests, and/or drafts for review
- Simply fill out the form (it takes about 30 minutes to gather files and write responses) as soon as your paper has been accepted

### Tips:

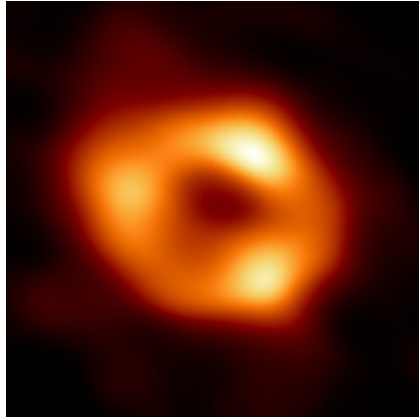
1. *Put the “news” at the beginning!*

- When we talk about science to other scientists, we often put the results at the end - but that’s the opposite flow of information for a news story about science
- In the first three sentences of the press release, the work should be put into context, results described, and implications highlighted - *then* the details!
- If you are having trouble brainstorming these different aspects of your work, try out this [message box worksheet](#) from Compass or even talking to a friend or relative that isn’t a scientist



2. *Craft analogies or metaphors*

- Even simple metaphors have powerful effects on science communication



*“Taking an image of Sgr A\* at 27,000 light-years away from Earth is akin to taking a photo of a single grain of salt in NYC using a camera in LA”*

*“We were able to measure whales by flying a camera high above them - essentially giving them a health check without them knowing we were there”*

3. *Ground numbers in social context*

- Similar to a metaphor, you can use “social math” to put more abstract quantities into context, for example:

*The Saturn V rocket was 363 feet tall, about the height of a 36-story-tall building, and 60 feet taller than the Statue of Liberty.*

*In the midwest, it’s 7°F warmer in the winter since 1974. That’s the difference between wearing long underwear and not wearing long underwear.*

- Check out the [measure of things](#), a search engine for creating numerical comparisons

4. *Tell a story*

- Research has shown that people’s brains light up more for narratives than for listings of facts. They also retain the information better and longer!
- Remember that stories with narrative arcs have a beginning, middle, and end
- A few ideas on story types (from [AGU’s Sharing Science](#)) - these can be used for inspiration, but no need to force your science into any of these schemes, it’s important to sell your science but not over-hype it
  - Journey: traveling to a place to study something, performing fieldwork
  - Quest: similar to a story, but seeking answers to big questions and covering trials and defeats
  - Mystery: framing the story around discovery, like insights to past climate from clues in glacial ice

- Stranger comes to town: someone or something unexpected arrives, similar to a mystery but more specific, like the COVID pandemic
- More storytelling tips and prompts from [NPR](#)

5. *Avoid jargon*

- Remember that the intended audience of press releases is non-scientists (or scientists from other fields). Here are some examples of what the impact of removing jargon can be:

*Jargon-filled: Microvesicle-derived microRNAs are important for intermolecular signaling in tumorigenesis*

*Jargon-filled: We present materials, mechanics, and integration schemes that afford scalable pathways to working arthropod-inspired cameras with nearly full hemispherical shapes*

*De-jargoned: Cancer cells communicate through a new molecular messenger*

*De-jargoned: New, high-tech digital cameras mimic bug eyes*

- If you must use jargon, try to only pick one thing to define - you will lose your audience if it becomes a vocabulary lesson
- There are some great web tools to help assess this - a fun exercise is to use [XKCD's UpGoer5 Text Editor](#), which forces you to type with only the 1000 most common words - another option is the [de-jargonizer](#), an online grading tool that analyzes the amount of jargon in your text

6. *Send additional materials*

- When sending an email to set up a press release, include additional photos, videos, headshots, or even graphical figures, especially when these components help tell your story

7. *Respond quickly to follow up emails*

- News cycles are very fast - try to respond on timescales of minutes and hours, not days or weeks

## References:

AGU Sharing Science. “A Scientist’s Guide to Working with the Media”

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