

Online Course in Science Journalism

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Lesson 3 - The interview

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3.1 Introduction

An interview can make or break a story. How to make the most out of interviews is a particularly tricky issue for science reporters, who must rely on highly specialised researchers who are more accustomed to lecturing students and writing for other academics than communicating with the general public.

Don't underestimate the fear factor: many scientists have no media training, worry that their reputation will be damaged by press coverage, and find interviews very scary indeed.

Don't lose sight of the ultimate goal of the interview: an interested and intrigued reader, viewer or listener.

Preparation is important, but not always possible. How to ask questions when you know nothing about the subject? How do you persuade a busy and stressed scientist to take the time to talk? How can you make a total stranger chat like an old friend? What if your notes do not accurately reflect the interview? These are all useful matters to consider.

In this chapter, you will work through these issues. At the end of this chapter, you will have a better understanding of how to persuade a scientist to grant you an interview, what to keep in mind when doing broadcast or written interviews and what questions to ask when you're on a tight deadline.

3.2 Preparing for the interview

A **pre-interview** is normally a **quick off-the-record interview in which you take notes but you don't report on the interviewee's views**. It helps you to understand the context of a development on which you are planning to report. Print journalists never do pre-interviews. But for television and radio reporters, a pre-interview is often used to determine if a scientist might be a suitable candidate for broadcasting.

A wide range of people are suitable for pre-interviews:

- Within the science community, you may not want to speak to the **most senior scientist** in a pre-interview. They may be very busy.
- **Post-graduates studying for their master's and doctoral degrees** can be hard to track down by phone but are often hanging around science departments and are a good source of information. If one of them is particularly articulate, you may want to consider him or her for a formal interview. Young students sometimes make for better television than their older counterparts. At the same time, you may need to find diplomatic ways to explain to the most senior scientists why you are not concentrating on them; they often have the power to block your access to their colleagues. Emphasising that you know how busy they are or how important it is to present a diversity of views may be a good technique.

Now is a good time to ask for images. A good-quality picture or drawing can greatly aid your own understanding, and may eventually be used to illustrate your final story. And sometimes, asking for pictures helps the person being interviewed understand the distinction between peer communication and mass communication. Check that you are not infringing on copyright laws and ensure that any photographer, cameraperson or artist is properly credited for their work.

3.3 Persuading scientists to speak to you

Most scientists appreciate more science coverage in the media. **Publicity for a scientist is an exchange, a trade-off.** Journalists give vital publicity to institutions, individuals and issues. We connect them to hundreds, thousands, even millions of people, including taxpayers and the next generation of scientists. In exchange, the scientists give us information and their time and effort to make the information accessible.

Point out that funders, universities and ministries of science like to see reports on their research. Mention that many funding application formulas consider media interviews as an important part of science outreach and communication, so scientists can list this in their next application. Inevitably someone will ask for the funding agency to be named in the report. You may wish to say "no." Don't be trapped into making a promise you can't keep.

Interviewees often worry that they might be misquoted. Offer the scientist to **read back the relevant parts** of your script or article to ensure accuracy. Do not read back for politicians, including science ministers and their press officers or spokespersons. Watch out for people trying to distort what you've written. It is the norm in journalism that interviewees are only allowed to comment on factual errors if they read back your article, and they have to comment before your deadline. Otherwise you must submit the story anyway.

Remember that the **taxpayer subsidises much science.** The public needs to know how their investment has paid off. Publicly funded scientists have a (moral) obligation to inform the public about what they are doing with taxpayers' money.

For **controversial stories**, you can tell your interviewee that you're doing a controversial story and that they may not like it but you still want to know their perspective. Few refuse to be interviewed. If they refuse, show up unannounced.

3.4 Consider your interview type

Different types of interviews require different questions. Make clear in your head what type of interview you need for your news outlet. SciDev.Net will not require you to conduct a personal profile, for example.

- **a personality or profile interview.** Ask personal, intimate questions of the whole person, not just the scientist. You might speak to his or her colleagues, friends and family.
- **a research interview.** Focus on the results, their accuracy, the process, and their implications.
- **a content or news interview.** A little interviewing with a wide range of people, including scientists, policy makers, educators and others, provides a broad perspective and multiple points of view.

A good interviewing technique is the oppositional interview, it adds spice to your interview. **An oppositional interview is sometimes known as "the devil's advocate" interview.** Take a critical position. Argue on behalf of the most argumentative reader or audience member, because it gives an opportunity for the scientist to provide a very persuasive response. Or raise arguments that other organisations have expressed. An example: "Some environmental campaigners object to genetic modification..."

EXAMPLE 1:

On the National Public Radio (USA) programme Science Friday, host Ira Flatow interviews one of the authors of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report. [http://www.sciencefriday.com/pages/2007/Feb/hour1_020207.html] About seven minutes into the interview, you will hear Flatow say, "There are critics who say that you didn't go far enough in this report, that you really are coddling the issue a bit in your conclusions." He expresses the concerns of other organisations. Is the question phrased in a strong enough manner? What would you have asked?

3.5 Confronting or lighthearted?

A journalist should consider, prior to the interview, how much emotional distance will be needed between himself or herself and the subject of the interview. A normal interview is not meant to extend your circle of friends! There are a couple of situations that call for particular caution and a really determined interview style:

- **An exposé.** The science ministry didn't spend its funds, the research results were falsified, or the scientist didn't reveal his commercial interests? You need to come prepared for a confrontation. It's better first to interview the people making the allegations before confronting the person responsible. Record everything. Keep the recorder running even when you're shaking hands and saying goodbye. That is the time when people inadvertently release the most important information or reveal their innermost thoughts.
- **A corporate, government or institutional announcement.** This is not an interview and should be identified as a prepared statement or a press release. Many so-called science interviews are actually attempts by companies to get free publicity for their products. Did you find a neutral, independent, respected researcher to analyse the claims in advance? If so, you should challenge the claims often made in such an interview.
- **A silly interview.** Are there really 181 things to do on the Moon, as NASA says? Can you conduct an interview in the middle of a condom testing laboratory? Science journalism can be very entertaining and if you can convince a scientist to play along, you will certainly win over your audience.

EXAMPLE:

This Newsnight programme aired on BBC television but is available here: [<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fubJLYm4JJk>]. A journalist who's been rubbishing claims of global warming is being confronted by writer and activist-journalist George Monbiot with evidence that all her so-called scientific research has in fact been paid for by front companies funnelling money from the oil industry. Confrontation can be perfectly polite. And useful, too. Watch how he does it.

3.6 Using technology in interviews

If you can't go on trips, bring the world to your fingertips through technology:

- Take part in press conferences that are **broadcast** on the internet.
- Ask large institutions such as the World Bank to organise **teleconferences** when you receive their press releases.
- Interview by **email** – which may be particularly useful if you are working across different time zones.
- Download free software like Skype to make free international telephone calls (with a headset) from [www.skype.com]. See the User Guide [<http://www.skype.com/intl/en-us/support/user-guides/>] for help on how to setup a Skype interview.
- **Instant messaging** interviews using software such as Skype are another possibility, even when you don't have microphone access at an internet café or a desktop computer. If the email goes down but the internet remains, use Skype's search facility to find international scientists.

These technologies bring the global scientist community to your desk for an interview. But there is a downside: **no body language**. The interview – unless you also have Skype video – is done without any eye contact. It's very hard to pick up the subtle physical clues that indicate the subject is avoiding an answer or has something further to say or that there's a colleague in the same room controlling the information. So this may be better used in preparation than in an on-the-record interview.

It is an excellent idea to record all interviews on a mini disk, digital or tape recorder as a backup. But don't put away your notebook and two pens – machines can break down. Make time before the interview to check batteries, disk storage, cables and everything else that could go wrong (including pens, which run out of ink!). Make sure you know how the equipment works!

And if it's a telephone interview, **remember to tell your interviewee that you would like to record the interview.** This may even be required by law in your country, make sure you check what the rules are. You may want to tell them that they can indicate during the interview whether a particular comment is off-the-record but then it has to be very clear to both participants when the interview is back on the record. And journalists should not allow scientists to decide after the interview which parts are off-record.

3.7 Getting the interview started

Explain how you are going to use the interview – will it be for a 20-second comment in a two-minute news story on radio? Will it be four paragraphs or four pages long in a magazine or newspaper?

The scientist may request a list of questions in advance for their own preparation. An advance list of three to five questions can be a good ice-breaker but take care to warn the scientist that you will expect to ask other questions as the conversation evolves, and do not allow the scientist to read from a prepared answer. Hold back some questions too – you may prefer a more spontaneous answer.

Location, location, location. Where do you do the interview? Not in a boring office. Even for print journalists doing an interview in a relevant location can add colour to your interview.

Use the lab where the actual research was done. Or in the factory making the new drugs. Or out in the field for agricultural research. Or in a hospital.

Wherever you are, try to prepare yourself the way you would for a job interview. Dress up rather than down, shake hands, make eye contact, refer to people by their correct title, sit well, pay attention, thank them later. Be ready to interview people who are older, younger, male, female, local or foreign. Treat them all professionally.

Sometimes a **public relations department** has been involved in setting up the interview. Very few public relations departments are set up to assist media people; they tend to focus on making the institution look good. Never allow a PR official to sit in on an interview. If for some reason you are unable to keep them out, place the PR people where you can see them, but the interviewee cannot.

Remember that you are in charge. Don't give the microphone away. Keep it in your hand. If the interviewee begins to speak to the cameraman, stop, explain and re-do. If the interviewee begins to speak as if to experts, stop again. Your responsibility is to your audience.

Don't be afraid to ask stupid questions! There are no stupid questions, only stupid answers.

3.8 Live broadcast interviews

Preparing for radio:

- Warn interviewees not to breathe across the phone, to **switch background cell phones off** and other things that could make noise, and not to speak simultaneously – you do not get a second chance.
- Warn science guests that they will **not have time to provide context**, especially in response to the first question. This is a snack, not a full meal, by science standards.
- Warn the scientist to avoid saying things like "as I said before" and "as I said during the ad break" since there is only the **present moment** in live radio.

Preparing for television:

- Preparing the scientist for the **intimidating surroundings** of a studio can be as important as preparing a list of questions.
- Ensure that they know about the **visual challenges of TV**. Are they dressed appropriately for the interview? Do they know where to look? Can they bring props that illustrate the issue? Do they know what to do with their hands?

On **live radio**, your first question must be the most interesting one, or your listener will switch off. The first question should not be broad, but to the point.

If you can get the scientist **into the radio studio** instead of on the phone, the sound improves immeasurably. If you can do live radio from the actual place where the science takes place, then say so on-air: "I'm standing here where Dolly the sheep was cloned, with the men who cloned her..."

On **live television**, know your questions in advance, so you can make eye-to-eye contact with the scientist. Be prepared to drop the question order to make follow-up questions, depending on the answers.

Even with the intense time pressures of live interviews, always **re-work the answer** if you don't understand it - "In other words, the issue is ..." – rather than simply moving forward to the next question on your list.

Never assume that the viewer or listener was tuned in for the entire interview. Work detail and context and the issue at stake into as many questions as possible for the benefit of those who have just turned on their television or radio.

Never ask questions which result in the answers "yes" or "no", which can completely derail a live interview, always ask open-ended questions.

3.9 Edited broadcast interviews

Preparing for radio:

- Try to do your interview in a location that is meaningful to the topic. This means that quality of sound – especially natural sound – is critical. You can ask the scientist to demonstrate some aspect of his or her research and talk us through it.
- Talk the scientist through what you plan to do, so he or she knows that a range of people will be interviewed in a package. Otherwise, the scientist may assume that he or she is being profiled rather than being one voice among many, which may lead to unfulfilled expectations.
- The same rules apply for online audio podcasts.

Preparing for television:

- An interview is not enough. You need pictures of the scientist working and, perhaps, talking to you. Visuals of the scientist peering into a microscope or walking through a laboratory can be more important than what the scientist actually says.
- Have you warned the scientist about the length of time it can take to film a sequence of shots?
- The same rules apply when you prepare an online video clip.

For **packaged radio**, you want a variety of voices, all of them brief.

It can help to ask the scientist being interviewed to **use your question** as the beginning of his or her response: "Why do we need malaria research?" "We need malaria research because..."

- Avoid questions with **time and date** references.
- Use **ambient sound** – the sound of science in action – as much as possible. It brings the listener inside science.
- Explaining the sound is good. Getting the interviewee to **explain the sound** is better. For example, the interviewee might say, "This is the cow we used for testing tick bite vaccines..." followed by the sound of mooing.

For **packaged television**, be well prepared with a limited number of questions that get to the point. But at the same time, be ready to ask the same important question repeatedly until you get a useable quote. Don't hesitate to interrupt the scientist to say that his or her answer was too long. Don't waste time indulging the desire of a scientist to explain everything – you can always suggest the possibility of a follow-up interview!

3.10 Interviews for print and internet

Many scientists are most comfortable with print, but internet sites are gaining in popularity. Articles online can often **link to resources** such as peer-reviewed research papers or the scientist's home page.

You need to let scientists know **how much time** they should invest in the interview. Is this a one-paragraph article or a two-page spread? A three-minute interview or a day-long in-depth effort? For tomorrow, or for next week?

Consider taking a **digital or cell phone photograph**, just in case that's also needed, as visuals can help achieve greater prominence and placement for your article.

If your interviewee is not very talkative, avoid the urge to ask a new question when they have stopped answering. **People get very uncomfortable when it's silent**, so your interviewee might intuitively start talking just to break the silence and perhaps reveal more than they intended to.

How do you incorporate an interview into an article:

- When you quote someone, state clearly **who** you are quoting.
- **Introduce** the interviewee in the beginning of the text.
- **Polishing up quotes** is permissible, you don't have to write down someone's exact wording. Written language is different from spoken language, after all.
- **Putting words into someone's mouth** is also permissible (quotes that he/she could have said). This may liven up the text. Check with the interviewee if you do this.

There are roughly four ways in which you can use an interview in written text:

- **Full quote interview:** the story consists of one long quote (direct speech), as in Playing with photodiodes [<http://www.delta.tudelft.nl/nl/archief/artikel/halfway-playing-with-photodiodes/21875>]
- **Question and answer interview:** questions and answers are given as literal quotes, as in Gods of Science [<http://www.guardian.co.uk/science/2010/sep/11/science-stephen-hawking-brian-cox>]
- **Indirect quotes:** you paraphrase what the interviewee has said (indirect speech)
EXAMPLE: She stated that students frequently had considerable problems with the issue, but did not offer an explanation for this fact.
- A **combination** of own text and quotes: alternate between direct and indirect quotes, own interpretations, and information from other sources.
EXAMPLE: In another study it was discovered that "students succeeded with tutoring."

3.11 "I don't understand"

Easily the most important question to remember in your science interview is: "I don't understand. **Please explain it again.**"

Even for a print or internet story, the act of recording the interview should not take away the **need to clarify** things during an interview. It's tempting to think of the next question and hope that the answer given will be clearer if you listen to it again on tape – but this is not likely. If it's not obvious to you during the interview, how can it be obvious to your reader?

Avoid technical terms and scientific concepts lifted from the scientist's research reports unless they are absolutely critical to the interview. If they are necessary, phrase the question so that it contains an explanation. Alternatively, coax your interviewee into explaining what is meant by the term or concept. Feed it back into the conversation: "My paper will probably say ..." Or perhaps, "So if I understand you correctly, you're saying ..." **You must insist on simple language.**

You should not normally be interviewing for more than 10 minutes without asking a question to check your understanding. But it's good to have a long interview if you are uncovering fraud or deceit of any kind. Just don't ask the critical question at the beginning, or it might be a very short interview! In a confrontational interview, you may have to "agree to disagree."

Leave the microphone on at the end of the interview. People start telling you all sorts of things once the interview appears to be over!

EXAMPLE:

The American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) used one of their podcasts on December 22, 2006 to wrap up their list of the most interesting science of the year. Listen to it on

[http://podcasts.aaas.org/science_podcast/SciencePodcast_061222.mp3] "Just what is the Poincaré conjecture?" is the first question at 1'18". The presenter prefaces it by warning that he is a non-mathematician. But the guest didn't pick up the coded reference. Did you understand the answer? Would you have asked another question as the first question in this segment of the podcast?

3.12 Keeping control of the interview

You may have to interrupt the scientist. Some scientists cannot stop talking once they've started. They go into educating mode. Say their full name, firmly and clearly. **You are in control of the interview.** If the scientist refuses to respond, ad breaks can be useful in live radio and television. Print reporters put down their pens and cross their arms. Camera people turn off their cameras.

Sometimes scientists with **dubious research** – or those with commercial agendas – woo the media. A scientist who is happy to see a camera or a microphone is not necessarily A Good Sign. Sometimes you will have to say no to scientists whose research does not merit a story.

A corporate story? Proceed with caution. Is there evidence to back up the claims? Find a scientist to interview who has no financial or personal ties to the others.

Avoid talking to a scientist on their own level. Even if you know the subject well, it doesn't help your reader or listener who is not a specialist in the field. Trying to put too much information into a story can also be dangerous.

3.13 Questions for emergencies

You don't know the subject, you don't know the name of the person you are interviewing, you have to finish the interview in five minutes – this is an emergency!

Ask for a business card if you don't know the name of the scientist. No card? Ask for the correct spelling of their full name.

There are a number of standard questions that always work:

- What is the occasion?
- What and how big is the problem?
- What is the cause?
- What are the consequences?
- What is the solution?
- What is its effect?

But to make your interview more exciting, try these:

- **"Briefly, what excites you about your work?"**
- This question, and its cousin, **"What is the most important aspect of your work?"** do not work very well for live interviews because the answer is inevitably too long.
- So try a speedy alternative, like, **"What kind of response has there been to your research?"**
- Or: **"Describe the day when you made your discovery."**
- They may say, "No, no, no, this process took a dozen people working flat out for a decade." Great! That's a good quote.
- Try: **"Tell us what scientific discoveries you made today" or "Why is your area of scientific discovery important (or relevant) for the ordinary citizen of this country?"**
- And ask, **"What happens next in the process of discovery?"**
- If you are doing a story on **fundamental scientific research**, link it to the needs of the community and intellectual exploration. You'll find that a story resides in every interview – even if the interviewee happily admits that they find their subject absorbing and fascinating and don't know if it helps anyone else. Many relevant scientific discoveries started in this fashion.
- Another good question is, **"What's the coolest thing about your work?"** This is deliberately crude and gets scientists giving a more personal and colourful view. A listener or reader may not know anything about bioinformatics but will still respond with interest to a scientist saying, "The really cool thing about bioinformatics is that you can go out into the wilderness, take your laptop, and sit and do your work."

3.14 Self-teaching questions (1-4)

The following questions should help you to revise the points of this lesson.

QUESTION 1:

A company announces a new herbal product will, they say, cure an important disease. All the claims and all the evidence come from the company. What is your first question for the following interviewees?

- a. The company spokesperson
- b. Someone suffering from the illness
- c. A World Health Organisation representative
- d. A local doctor

QUESTION 2:

While speaking to a representative of a science institution or ministry in a face-to-face interview, he or she says: "That question is not important. I'm not going to answer that question." How should you respond?

- a. "Are you avoiding the question?"
- b. "I can't force you to answer the question, but it does rather make you look as if you are dodging the issue."
- c. You don't respond at all, you simply go on to the next question.
- d. You repeat the question.
- e. You avoid a confrontation but lay a complaint later with the interviewee's boss.

QUESTION 3:

There is an outbreak of bird flu in your region. A journalist has interviewed the following people, asking each person one question. Why is each one a bad question for that particular interview?

- a. A subsistence-level chicken farmer, a grandmother operating in the informal economy; "Do you know how H5N1 works?"
- b. A state veterinarian in charge of monitoring the country's biggest chicken market; "Why haven't you done more to fight bird flu?"
- c. A bird life campaigner who says bird flu doesn't really exist but is a plot by the CIA and western intelligence agencies to destroy the indigenous economy; "Describe this plot by the CIA to make us believe in bird flu."
- d. The owner of a large company owning many chicken farms as well as the distribution network which gets the poultry into the supermarkets; "Is the government doing enough to protect your chickens?"
- e. A representative of the medical company marketing some of the drugs for avian influenza; "Is the government buying enough drugs from you?"

QUESTION 4:

Powerful people can be intimidating to interview. But they are often quite accustomed to being asked questions, so sometimes the biggest obstacle is your own attitude. Write down your main question as if you have been given a five-minute interview with the following people:

- a. Nobel Peace Prize winner and first democratic president of South Africa, Nelson Mandela, on HIV/AIDS.
- b. Your own government's prime minister or president, after the news breaks that his or her son is HIV positive.
- c. The secretary-general of the United Nations on climate change.
- d. The governor of the World Bank on the need to fund scientific research and development.
- e. A quantum physics professor who's just been told that she's won this year's Nobel prize.

3.15 Answers to self-teaching questions (1-4)

QUESTION 1:

A company announces a new herbal product will, they say, cure an important disease. All the claims and all the evidence come from the company. What is your first question for the following interviewees?

Answer: A variety of first questions are possible, including the following:

- a. Does someone else have independent, scientifically sound confirmation of the results?
- b. Tell us about the day you discovered you had this disease.
- c. What immediate steps need to be taken to deal with this illness?
- d. How big a health risk is posed by this disease?

QUESTION 2:

While speaking to a representative of a science institution or ministry in a face-to-face interview, he or she says: "That question is not important. I'm not going to answer that question." How should you respond?

Answer:

- a. An acceptable response, as long as it is delivered in a calm and professional manner. If journalist appears upset or irritated, it can suggest that you are taking the exchange personally.
- b. A good response, because it leaves the way open for the person being interviewed to answer the original question.
- c. A terrible response. You have now given control of the interview to the interviewee. You have abdicated!
- d. A possible response, but it can be boring in broadcasting to hear the same question repeated in an identical manner. It might be suitable in interviews for print and internet reports, however.
- e. This tactic does not rescue the actual interview. It may only be worth considering if you know that you need to interview this person on a regular basis.

QUESTION 3:

There is an outbreak of bird flu in your region. A journalist has interviewed the following people, asking each person one question. Why is each one a bad question for that particular interview?

Answers:

A number of answers are possible, including:

- a. You're likely to get either the answer "yes" or the answer "no," which doesn't take you very far. And it doesn't take advantage of the strengths of interviewing this kind of non-science person about a science issue.
- b. We want to know what he does when he comes across a dead chicken. We don't want one individual blamed for all government policy, particularly when it comes to a highly infectious, little-understood illness. And the question doesn't ask anything interesting about his work. When asked the right questions, an Indian veterinarian once spoke about the stresses of fighting bird flu with no way to deal with sick fowl besides slaughtering them, and with laboratory results not appearing until months later.
- c. In some circumstances, you could persuade an interviewee to ruin his own case in this manner, if your audience were sufficiently well-informed. But consider these recent incidents: a campaign to vaccinate against polio flounders in Nigeria and parts of India after allegations that vaccinated children become infertile as adults; the South African government refuses to believe in the existence of HIV/AIDS; the Gambian president claims that he can cure people of AIDS with herbs in three days; the Zimbabwean police confiscate women's sanitary supplies on the grounds that they are poisoned. It is essential in these situations to provide a balanced range of views so as not to give undue publicity to someone whose views do not merit coverage.
- d. People will always agree that someone else should be doing more in a given situation. You want to find out what he's doing, not what he thinks the government should be doing.
- e. Have you ever heard anyone from a drug company saying that they're selling too much?

QUESTION 4:

Powerful people can be intimidating to interview. But they are often quite accustomed to being asked questions, so sometimes the biggest obstacle is your own attitudes. Write down your main question as if you have been given a five-minute interview with the following people on the following topics:

Answers:

A variety of answers are possible.

3.16 Assignments (1-4)

These assignments are homework that you can do yourself and then discuss with a tutor, mentor or other mentees.

ASSIGNMENT 1: Interviews on a slow news day

Contact a science organisation in your country or region. There is an Academy of Science in most countries. You can find many of them under the "membership" button at the Academy of Sciences for the Developing World website at: [<http://www.twas.org>] or the Interacademy Panel on International Issues at: [<http://www.interacademies.net>]. Many countries have some version of a CSIR (Council for Scientific and Industrial Research). Or you could investigate some university science faculties. Track down their longest-serving scientist as well as their newest scientist. There has to be a story in there somewhere. If possible, visit in person and hang out in the cafeteria or wherever you can strike up conversations with the scientists. Identify yourself. Ask what they do. Ask if you can keep in touch with them. Ask what is interesting about their work. This is relationship-building. But it pays off: you may find yourself doing a personality profile, or previewing some still-in-the-pipeline science which hasn't been published yet, or reporting on the painstaking process of science or on funding cutbacks. This is what you do on a slow news day.

ASSIGNMENT 2: Getting more from an interview

This is a fairly easy exercise to work into your existing schedule.

- a. When doing a face-to-face interview, take an additional 10 minutes to interview the person again in a completely different style. For example, if you were reporting on a hard news story, try to do a personality profile. If you were getting a sound bite for radio news, what about trying to do something for a programme or a talk show? You may well find you can use both interviews for different media outlets.
- b. You can also do one same interview but consider it for different markets. Would you ask the same questions for an 800-word international science news website like SciDev.Net, for a three-paragraph story in the local daily newspaper, or for the news section of the journal Nature?

ASSIGNMENT 3: New technologies in interviews

Try to initiate and conduct a brief international interview through email, instant messaging, Skype, or any other technology, including cellphones. Try interviewing a colleague – a mentee or a journalist – who will be open to experimenting with new technology, but try not to pick someone in your own neighbourhood or country. If you are interested in the newest technologies, try to initiate your own free science blog or podcast in which you document your interviews.

ASSIGNMENT 4: Broaden your interview scope

Select your most unlikely candidate for a science-based interview. For example, if you hated mathematics, or never understood physics or your editor thinks geologists are irrelevant, pick someone with strengths in those areas. Try to understand some of their work, and try to do an interview on this topic – perhaps a personal interview, so you don't have to explain too much of the science, but ask about their life, their wife or husband and their children as well. And ask about why they love their work, rather than focus on the work itself without the personal touch. Write it up in under 800 words for an international audience. Send it to the non-profit website [<http://www.scienceinAfrica.co.za>] if it is appropriate for their use, and it may be published, especially if you include a picture. They won't charge you for editing, and in exchange, you won't be paid.