1. SCIENTIST AS SOURCE

When you write an article or a commentary, you (and your editor) control the process. You get to say what you want in the order you want; you can be very careful about accuracy and nuance. When you're a source in a reporter's story, she (and her editor) controls it. She's not necessarily interested in conveying the finer points of your latest research results, or protecting your reputation. More likely she wants to use you as an "expert" to comment on an issue or a development in your field (or in a field with a vaguely similar name). Unless she is working for a specialized science show, the reporter likely:

- is pressed for time and afraid of drowning in details;
- doesn't know much to begin with;
- is determined to tell a simple story (e.g., from chaos to order, from problem to solution);
- wants to know what's new or different or controversial;
- is looking for a clear position (she has the “pro,” she just needs the “con”)
- is speaking to several other people about the same thing;
- can and will put words in your mouth (e.g., in the way she sets you up and the way she summarizes what you’ve said); and
- can edit the words you actually do say.

Job 1: Inform the Reporter

- She will be making lots of decisions about how to tell her story. The risk is that she gets it all wrong. Make sure she understands the basic issues.
- Relate the work to things people know and care about, not to developments in your field.
• Don't be afraid to share or interpret results that aren't yours (just don't claim credit!).

• Be as bold as you can (ethically) be about the implications of the work: "If we can understand THIS, it could help us do THIS." It’s not a question of making false promises or exaggerated claims, but of putting the work in context. Why are you shooting rockets into the Arctic night? Why do you need to know the age of those rocks?

**Job 2: Provide Sound Bites**

• Sound bites are usually less than 20 seconds (even on public radio!).

• Odd as it may sound, the reporter will probably handle the facts; you supply the argument and the color.

• Try to speak in short, complete sentences. Avoid referring to things you said earlier ("as I already told you...") or finishing the reporter's sentences ("that's because...").

• Sound excited! Or at least engaged. Low energy comes through loud and clear.

• Sound like a human being (you are!).

• Keep your jargon under control (even words you learned in your first year of college).

• Avoid numbered lists ("There are six main factors that determine crystal morphology... ").

• Talk about your process -- especially the process of discovery ("and then one morning I opened the lid and there was the most wonderful thing...").

• Use analogies. “It’s like one morning you stand on the scale and suddenly you’ve put on 200 pounds.” “It’s like protecting your house with 10 little locks instead of one big one.”

• Use sensory language -- visual, olfactory, tactile.

• Use your whole voice (don't croak!)

• Practice on your friends!
2. SCIENTIST AS INTERVIEW SUBJECT

The long-form interview format is more forgiving, more interactive, and gives you more time to make your points. But it also requires brevity, clarity, relevance -- basically all the tips for informing the reporter and crafting sound bites apply. You just get to do more of them.

- Know the show. The Family Life Network, the local AM news show, Science Friday and Free Speech Radio News will want different things and ask different sorts of questions.

- Ask the interviewer whether the interview will be broadcast live or edited for later broadcast. Ask if you can retake botched lines. Ask how long it will be in its final form. Time your answers (and mind your words) accordingly.

- Remember your audience -- it's not the person interviewing you, but John & Jane Doe.

- Don't be afraid to steer the conversation back to things you feel comfortable talking about ("That's a great question, and it really relates to this bigger question about...")

- Have fun! How often do you get to talk about your work with thousands or millions of people?

3. SCIENTIST AS COLLABORATOR

It's worth thinking about teaming up with journalists to reach a non-specialist audience. If you're a good storyteller, the spoken word alone can be enough to retain people's interest. But radio can be much more layered. Think of the sounds your work makes, or of the sounds of the world that your work explores. Some of the most engaging radio about science uses sound in fun or provocative ways.