# How to pitch your research to a journalist or editor

Megan Gannon EGU 2016 @meganigannon meganigannon.com megan.i.gannon@gmail.com

## Don't take your methods for granted

- "Fieldwork and labwork is inherently fascinating to people who have never done that."
- "If you have the opportunity to invite a journalist into your space to watch the research happen, do it."

# Don't take your methods for granted





WitmerLab at Ohio University Page Liked · March 25, 2014 · Edited · @

We're going to CT scan the Siamese croc at OhioHealth O'Bleness Hospital this weekend, if all goes as planned. We want to scan the whole thing, so we thawed him out enough to snug the limbs into the body with a couple trusty trucker's hitch knots, and then slid him back into the freezer. Addendum...in case you're not familiar with the story of this croc, please click through the next images. This animal is no longer alive. It was a natural casualty that came to our lab in December for study.

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#### **IVESCIE** TECH HEALTH PLANET EARTH SPACE STRANGE NEWS ANIMALS HIST

By Megan Gannon, News Editor | April 03, 2014 02:43pm ET



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Credit: Ohio University View full size image

For the past 15 years, anatomist Larry Witmer has been going through the back door of the O'Bleness Hospital in Athens, Ohio, pushing coolers stuffed with dead animals into the CT scanning room. He has brought in ostriches, slain rhinoceroses and rare kiwis. Last week, Witmer arrived with an 8.5-foot-long (2.6 meters) Siamese crocodile.

Witmer has dozens, sometimes hundreds, of animals in his freezer at Ohio University at any

given time. He chose his car (a Ford Edge) based on its capacity to fit his unusual cargo. ("My wife is very forgiving," he says.) He primarily studies the evolution of organs in the skulls of dinosaurs, but unfortunately the fossil record doesn't give him much to work with --- just the bones and teeth, not muscles, nerves, brain tissue or skin.

"As a biologist, I want to understand how they worked as living, breathing creatures," Witmer told Live Science. The closest approximation of preserved dinosaur soft tissue comes from dinosaurs' closest extant cousins: birds and crocodilians. That's why Witmer recently jumped on the chance to study a rare Siamese crocodile, thought to be in its 30s, that died of natural causes last year at a park called Alligator Adventure in North Myrtle Beach, S.C. [See Photos of the Frozen Croc's Trip to the Hospital]

"For the past 15 years, anatomist Larry Witmer has been going through the back door of the O'Bleness Hospital in Athens, Ohio, pushing coolers stuffed with dead animals into the CT scanning room. He has brought in ostriches, slain rhinoceroses and rare kiwis. Last week, Witmer arrived with an 8.5-foot-long (2.6 meters) Siamese crocodile."

### ANNALS OF SEISMOLOGY JULY 20, 2015 ISSUE

### THE REALLY BIG ONE

An earthquake will destroy a sizable portion of the coastal Northwest. The question is when.

#### **BY KATHRYN SCHULZ**

The next full-margin rupture of the Cascadia subduction zone will spell the worst natural disaster in the history of the continent.

ILLUSTRATION BY CHRISTOPH NIEMANN; MAP BY ZIGGYMAJ / GETTY

hen the 2011 earthquake and tsunami struck Tohoku, Japan, Chris Goldfinger was two hundred miles away, in the city of Kashiwa, at an international meeting on seismology. As the shaking started, everyone in the room began to laugh. Earthquakes are common in Japan—that one was the third of the week—and the participants were, after all, at a seismology conference. Then everyone in the room checked the time.



Seismologists know that how long an earthquake lasts is a decent proxy for its magnitude. The 1989 earthquake in Loma Prieta, California, which killed sixty-three people and caused six billion dollars' worth of damage, lasted about fifteen seconds and had a magnitude of 6.9. A thirty-second earthquake generally has a magnitude in the

# Give us stories and context

- "Pitch me a story, not a topic."
- "Science is incremental, and the work most scientists are doing is incremental, and it's actually crucial that it is incremental, because the process requires it. But getting news across to readers requires giving it a deeper meaning and setting it in the big picture."

# Ask yourself whether your results are newsworthy

 "At the end of the day, newsworthiness has little to do with what makes a scientific endeavor worthy. However, scientists and journalists work together better if both have a clear sense of what each looks for in new research...It's really a matter of remembering that each group has its own audience with its own set of interests. Scientists want to understand the processes that shape the world; lay audiences want to understand how they fit into it."

> What makes newsworthy science? Depends on your audience. By Julia Rosen, AGU's The Plainspoken Scientist blog, 9 Nov. 2015 http://blogs.agu.org/sciencecommunication/2 015/11/09/what-makes-newsworthy-sciencedepends-on-your-audience/



Learn, Engage, Be Inspired!

### **Are My Results Newsworthy?**

#### Newsworthy

- Are new or previously unknown
- Advance a field significantly
- Might impact our daily lives
- Relate to current events
- Are cool or eye-catching
- Go against the current consensus
- Include striking videos or photographs

#### Non-newsworthy

- Are an incremental advance
- Improve a model or technique
- Confirm what is already known
- Have already been reported
- Summarize the latest in a field (review paper)



#### sharingscience.agu.org



## **Be patient**

 "Tell them to be patient when journalists ask questions, even if they ask the same question a couple of times...We are making complex subjects understandable to non-scientists, not dumbing it down."

## Remember: journalists serve readers, not scientists

- "Journalists want information out there, and scientists also want their findings out there — but that doesn't necessarily put us on the same team."
- "Even if scientists want to pitch and promote their research by reaching out to journalists, they should be aware that our role is not to promote their agenda, but to inform the public in an objective manner."

## Remember: journalists serve readers, not scientists

 "Scientists can't expect to control the narrative, and they can't expect that the narrative will be only about The Science ... sociopolitical context will often matter as much as scientific context. Some scientists seem to think that journalists should be 'purists' about presenting 'only the science,' again making that mistake about being on the same team."

## Remember: journalists serve readers, not scientists

 "Please explain that many journalists will refuse to run quotes by the scientists or let them read the story before it's published. I get that a lot."

## Stay in touch

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## EGU 2016

#### **DR RHIAN MEARA**

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R.H.Meara@swansea.ac.uk

## **ACADEMIC BACKGROUND**



University of Leicester



University of Glasgow







**Swansea University Prifysgol Abertawe** 

## **MEDIA EXPERIENCE**



## **TAKE \*EVERY\* OPPORTUNITY**



## KNOW YOUR STRENGTHS

- What is your academic background?
- What are your languages?
- What is your communication experience?
- Who do you know?
- What can your employer do to help?
- What training can you apply for?

## **IMPOSTER SYNDROME**



## **IMPOSTER SYNDROME**



## Is the New Communication Climate Good or Bad for the Human-Climate Relationship?

## Water, Water, Everywhere, But...?



Jack Cook/ whoi.edu

## Water, Water, Everywhere, But...?



Jack Cook/ whoi.edu







#### 





j.mp/92warmbook

Perhaps earth scientists of the future will name this new post-Holocene era for its causative element -- for us. We are entering an age that might someday be referred to as, say, the Anthrocene. After all, it is a geological age of our own making. The challenge now is to find a way to act that will make geologists of the future look upon this age as a remarkable time, a time in which a species began to take into account the long-term impact of its actions.

### 2003, North Pole







Science nome	Current Issue	Previous Issues	Science Express	Science Product
<u>ie</u> > <u>Science</u> Ma	agazine > <u>7 May 3</u>	2010 > Gleick et al.	, pp. 689 - 690	
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#### j.mp/polarbearproblem



Atmos. Chem. Phys. Discuss., 15, 20059-20179, 2015 www.atmos-chem-phys-discuss.net/15/20059/2015/ doi:10.5194/acpd-15-20059-2015 © Author(s) 2015. This work is distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 License.

#### **Research article**

Ice melt, sea level rise and superstorms: evidence from paleoclimate data, climate modeling, and modern observations that 2 °C global warming is highly dangerous

#### **Review status**

This discussion paper is under review for the journal Atmospheric Chemistry and Physics (ACP).

2055-2060 Surface Air Temperature (°C) Relative to 1880-1920

A1B + Modified Forcings, Ice Melt to 1 m

23 Jul 2015

1.19

J. Hansen<sup>1</sup>, M. Sato<sup>1</sup>, P. Hearty<sup>2</sup>, R. Ruedy<sup>3,4</sup>, M. Kelley<sup>3,4</sup>, V. Ma G. Russell<sup>4</sup>, G. Tselioudis<sup>4</sup>, J. Cao<sup>6</sup>, E. Rignot<sup>7,8</sup>, I. Velicogna<sup>7,8</sup>, K. von Schuckmann<sup>10</sup>, P. Kharecha<sup>1,4</sup>, A. N. Legrande<sup>4</sup>, M. Baue





Climate Seer James Hansen Issues His Direst Forecast Yet Daily Beast - Jul 20, 2015 This roughly 10 feet of sea level rise-well beyond previous estimates-would ... The Nature Climate Change study and Hansen's

new paper give ... Celsius by 2100 are in many ways similar to those limiting warming to below ....

Three Things to Know About That Terrifying New Climate Study Yahoo News - Jul 22, 2015

Sea Level Could Rise As Much As 10 Feet Over The Next 50 Years ...

Times Gazette - Jul 22, 2015

Climate Scientist: Sea Levels Could Rise 10 Feet By 2065

ValueWalk - Jul 22, 2015

The godfather of global warming's frightening prediction is getting ... Mashable - Jul 22, 2015

The world's most famous climate scientist just outlined an alarming ... Highly Cited - Washington Post - Jul 20, 2015





**Times Gazette** 







#### Climate Central

Yahoo News

ValueWalk

Mashable

RTCC

Finally ... avoid scientific jargon.

Below is a list of words that mean one thing to scientists and something else entirely to the public and reporters. To lower the risk of being misunderstood, avoid them. Ask a media expert for alternatives.

Aerosol Uncertainty Literature Enhance Risk Disruptive Feedback Organic Regime Radiation Enrichment Sign Theory

#### Different audiences, different meanings

CLIMATE CHANGE | MAY 12, 2014 = 176

#### Consider Clashing Scientific and Societal Meanings of 'Collapse' When Reading Antarctic Ice News

By ANDREW C. REVKIN



#### 12 MAY 2014

#### CLIMATE CHANGE

#### Irreversible Collapse

New results suggest that early-stage collapse of the Thwaites Glacier in Antarctica has already begun and irreversible collapse is likely to begin in the next 200 to 1,000 years.

The summary of a Science Magazine paper <u>on ice sheet changes in Antarctica</u> spoke of collapse, on a time scale of centuries. Science Magazine

Updated, May 14, 11:46 a.m. | For decades, the inevitability of <u>many feet</u>, <u>even yards</u>, <u>of sea-level rise in a warming climate has been crystal</u> <u>clear</u>. But society's response, both in stemming heat-trapping greenhouse gas emissions and adapting to eroding coastlines, will always be more a function of the rate of change than the ultimate outcome. NATURE | LETTER

#### 日本語要約

### Human contribution to more-intense precipitation extremes

Here we show that human-induced increases in greenhouse gases have contributed to the observed intensification of heavy precipitation events found over approximately two-thirds of data-covered parts of Northern Hemisphere land areas.

#### Gavin Schmidt:

"Here we show" statements are required by Nature and Science to clearly lay out the point of the paper. If you don't include it, they will write it in. The caveats/uncertainties/issues all come later. I think the confusion is more cultural than anything. No one at Nature or Science or any of the authors in any subject think that uncertainties are zero, but they require a clear statement of the point of the paper within their house style. NATURE | LETTER

#### 日本語要約

#### Human contribution to more-intense precipitation extremes

At the tail end of the full paper, capping a paragraph about a weak spot in the analysis — that the observed trend in extreme precipitation events exceeds what is produced by various climate models — comes a sentence about uncertainties:

There are, however, uncertainties related to observational limitations, missing or uncertain external forcing and model performance.
### IPCC to its authors

### Finally ... avoid scientific jargon.

Below is a list of words that mean one thing to scientists and something else entirely to the public and reporters. To lower the risk of being misunderstood, avoid them. Ask a media expert for alternatives.

Aerosol Uncertainty Literature Enhance Risk Disruptive Ozone Bias Feedback Organic Regime Radiation Enrichment Sign Theory Exploitation

# j.mp/wmorevkin



Volume 60(1) - 2011

#### The new communications climate

by Andrew C. Revkin\*

#### From blogs to videos, Twitter to cell phones, new forms of media provide new opportunities for outreach.

One of the most enduring needs of societies rich and poor is for reliable and timely information on the weather and, increasingly, on the causes and consequences of grander-scale shifts in the climate system itself.

We live at a point in human history when technology and communication would seem to make it entirely possible to serve societies' needs. I have an application on my smart phone that provides a radar loop of regional weather, moment by moment. I can click onto Climate.gov, a Website



© www.sxc.hu/ Zanetta Hardy

created recently by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and track trends in carbon dioxide concentrations or sea level. The explosive expansion of mobile phone subscriptions in developing countries could soon erase a substantial portion of the digital divide between rich and poor. Already, a rural farmer in Kenya can get her maize price by phone even when she lacks a light bulb or toilet. Imagine when she can also get longer-term precipitation forecasts to help decide which crops to plant.



Greg Asner, Carnegie Inst.







### Thermal – Tailored Thermal – Typical Text - Typical



Report with thermal images of own home



Report with thermal images of a typical home DOORS

Colder air often enters the house via draughts around, at the top and the bottom of an external door. Cold air can enter the house at the point where patio doors meet in the centre. Out flaps in doors can allow cold air to enter the house

#### CEILINGS

Heat escapes and cold air enters the house where loft insulation is of reduced thickness, missing or misplaced. Loft hatches often get forgotten when loft insulation is fitted.

#### FLOORS AND SKIRTINGS

Cold draughts can enter the house from the floor and walks at the skirting boards, especially if the ground floor is wooden and suspended.

Report with text only, same information as the thermal-typical

edf.org

Making Heat Visible: Promoting Energy Conservation Behaviors Through Thermal Imaging, Goodhew et al., Environment & Behavior 2015, Vol. 47(10)

گر بنانے کا مناسب طریقہ: كمر بنان كا غلط طريقه: -سربے کو مضبوطی سے جوڑنا تاکہ ستون دیوار اور چھت سریے کا غلط استعال: لیعنی دیواروں یا ستونوںاور حجہت کے درمیان جوژون کا کمزور ہونا یا سی ند ہونا۔ آپن میں پوست ہو جائیں۔ تین جصے صاف ریت اور زياده ريت اور مخى سمينك كاكم استعال

A poster distributed in Pakistan by earthquake experts shows the right and wrong way to mix concrete. Roger Bilham and Rebecca Bendick

### j.mp/quakebuild

### Knowosphere at Work: Farmer-to-Farmer Video Advice Boosting Yields

By ANDREW C. REVKIN





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#### SPECIAL ARTICLE

#### The Spread of Obesity in a Large Social Network over 32 Years

Nicholas A. Christakis, M.D., Ph.D., M.P.H., and James H. Fowler, Ph.D. N Engl J Med 2007; 357:370-379 | July 26, 2007 | DOI: 10.1056/NEJMsa066082



Abstract	Article	References	Citing Articles (627)

s (627) Glossary Letters

#### BACKGROUND

The prevalence of obesity has increased substantially over the past 30 years. We performed a quantitative analysis of the nature and extent of the person-to-person spread of obesity as a possible factor contributing to the obesity epidemic.

Full Text of Background ...

#### METHODS

We evaluated a densely interconnected social network of 12,067 people assessed repeatedly from 1971 to 2003 as part of the Framingham Heart Study. The body-mass index was available for all subjects. We used longitudinal statistical models to examine whether weight gain in one person was associated with weight gain in his or her friends, siblings, spouse, and neighbors.





Obesity In A Large Social Network.

#### FIGURE 1



j.mp/nejmobesity

### Escape from the "Nerd Loop"

#### **DOT EARTH**

Nine Billion People. One Planet.

A Postcard From the Pleistocene





Randy Olson @abtagenda

# Social media...



# #

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### Noise



### Signal

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### #iamascientistbecause





#IAmAScientistBecause I'm incessantly curious about nature!

Hag Moth caterpillar Phobetron sp. Paraná, Brazil

41

16



#### What to watch next



#### HOA with Stanford Professor Noah Diffenbaugh: Release of New Climate Paper...

by Noah Diffenbaugh 🖾



# @KHayhoe FOLLOWS YOU





### Be the Signal

@asteroidwatch



Jet Propulsion Laboratory California Institute of Technology JPL HOME EARTH SOLAR SYSTEM BRING THE UNIVERSE TO YOU:

INTERACTIVES &

VIDEO & AUDIO

# ASTEROID WATCH

### **Asteroid Watch**



### Be the Signal



@keeling\_curve



Take Action!

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Ask us anything

96 Elephants: Vintage Horror Show - The True Cost of Ivory

j.mp/ivorywcs



### Isaac Frescia

# No more gatekeeper



# No more gatekeeper





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Gender Equality	Water		

### e360 digest

E360 Video: Indonesian Villagers Use Drones to Protect Their Forest





Yale Environment 360 is a publication of the Yale School of Forestry & Environmental Studies.

SEARCH E360



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#### SEPTEMBER 18, 2014

Home

#### China on the Verge of Exterminating Its Sturgeon

By John Cronin • Ecology, General, International, Pollution, Sustainability, Water • Tags: Chinese Academy of Fishery Sciences, Chinese sturgeon, extinction, Gezhouba Dam, IUCN red list





Ensia is a magazine showcasing enviror Powered by the <u>Institute on the Enviror</u> <u>Minnesota</u>, we connect people with idea they can use to change the world.





NOTABLE



#### FEATURE

Hey, America: It's time to talk about the price of water

Q. Search analysis, research,

ARTICLES

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### THE CONVERSATION

Academic rigour, journalistic flair





PhD researcher in Volcanology at University College London

Profile

Articles



#### grwylie9

Article Feed

- r.wylie.11@ucl.ac.uk
- Joined 9 December 2013



#### 25 September 2014

### Could there really be such a thing as volcano season?

By Robin Wylie, University College London

Robin's Activity

The Earth seems to have been smoking a lot recently. Volcanoes are currently erupting in Iceland, Hawaii, Indonesia and Mexico. Others, in the Philippines and

Papua New Guinea, erupted recently but seem ...



#### 1 September 2014

#### Move over Iceland, Tavurvur in Papua New Guinea is the volcano to watch

By Robin Wylie, University College London

Last week, the eyes of volcanologists - and presumably a few nervous pilots - were fixed on

Iceland. But unexpectedly, the volcanic eruption that made headlines happened on the other side of the world...

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Soy fields in Brazilian Amazon rainforest. Frontpepe/www.Shutterstock.com

Email Email		Brazil's economy is teetering on t
🎔 Twitter	106	been rocked by recent corruption
Facebook	81	the nation's leaders. And yet thing
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🖨 Print		At the beginning of the last decad
		Brazil produces about one-third of
		than from any other commodity.

razil's economy is teetering on the edge of collapse. The country's political regime has een rocked by recent corruption scandals, and impeachment proceedings are encircling e nation's leaders. And yet things couldn't be much better for Brazil's soybean farmers. the beginning of the last decade, Brazil emerged as a major soybean exporter. Today, razil produces about one-third of the global supply and earns more from soybean exports

#### Authors



Peter Richards Postdoctoral Fellow, Brown University



Jeffrey Hoelle Assistant Professor of Anthropology, University of California, Santa Barbara



Adam Nieman

# Water, Water, Everywhere, But...?



Jack Cook/ whoi.edu







### **Crossing Boundaries**





### @USGSjwp



Consequences of twenty-first-century policy for multi-millennial climate and sea-level change – Clark et al. Nature Climate Change, 2/16/16

b



Consequences of twenty-first-century policy for multi-millennial climate and sea-level change – Clark et al. Nature Climate Change, 2/16/16

### Popes & 'Destiny Studies'



j.mp/dotvatican

### The Virtues of "Mundane Science"

Avoidance of the mundane sphere has been a continuing characteristic of modern science, without prejudice to particular disciplines....

[A]gricultural scientists valorized the high-tech green revolution agriculture and ignored low-tech, native systems of managing forests and fields; health experts pursued "exotic" diseases (like Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome [SARS]) while ignoring ubiquitous problems like infant diarrhea and indoor air pollution....

Science, Society and the Environment : Applying Anthropology and Physics to Sustainability / Michael R. Dove and Daniel M. Kammen






## Young scientists meet to debate the future of the economy

During this week 30 excellent young scientists from across the globe will meet in Villa Vigoni with an interdisciplinary team of advance integrative research and knowledge on societies' transition towards a green economy.

## Futureearth.info

## We are here

1

I am here: @revkin arevkin@pace.edu nytimes.com/dotearth

♠