Media training

by DIRK HANS

Media training for scientists is being offered increasingly by universities, research centres, research clusters and funding organisations. The aim is to prepare scientists for contact with journalists so that they can communicate scientific content as competently and comprehensibly as possible. On the other hand, of course, it is also about presenting one's own research and institution in a favourable light.

Media training usually consists of a theoretical part in which the media's way of working and thinking is explained, and a practical part in which a professional appearance in front of a microphone and camera can be rehearsed. The training is supposed to be fun, even if the on-camera exercises can be a little bit intimidating. After all, you might embarrass yourself in front of your colleagues because the training usually takes place in small groups. As a result, there is often a slightly tense cheerfulness among the participants. The trainers are then responsible not only for imparting profound knowledge, but also for making the experiment enjoyable. Nobody is perfect, after all, and the training is there precisely to try things out and learn.

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The trainers are often science journalists. They tend to have the perfect double qualification: They know science and journalism very well. Training that takes place in larger groups typically lacks individual practice time. If it lasts longer than a day it may be useful for aspiring media professionals in science, but it is generally considered too time-consuming for many researchers. As there are a lot of trainers offering their services on the market, a careful comparison is recommended. The question of experience and previous clients should always be asked, as a bad training session will spoil the day for several scientists at once. In addition, when composing groups, which is usually done at the institutions, make sure that only people from one hierarchical level are put together. No senior professor likes to appear in front of first-year students as someone who needs tutoring.

And one thing is particularly important, and perhaps should have been mentioned at the beginning of the article: Media training teaches very basic communication skills that are not just helpful for dealing with the media. Anyone who can succinctly articulate why their research is important and exciting will also cut a fine figure at the next standing reception with the executive board and industry partners. So if you are a scientist interested in improving your communication skills, check out the opportunities at your research institution to take part in a media training course.

Recommended reads:

- Hayes R. & Grossman D. (2006). *A scientist's guide to talking with the media*. Rutgers University Press. ISBN: 9780813538587
- Von Campenhausen J. (2014). *Wissenschaft vermitteln*. Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-531-19361-8