



AMERICAN
PSYCHOLOGICAL
ASSOCIATION

How to Work with the Media: A Handbook for Psychologists

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Introduction

Because psychology touches virtually every aspect of our existence, psychological research is some of the most widely reported news in the United States, if not the world.

At some point in your career, a reporter may call you for an interview or invite you to appear on a television or radio program. Or you might want to talk to reporters to spread the word about your work.

The media provide an opportunity for you to tell the public more about your work, your latest research findings, or an issue of particular concern to you as a psychologist. You will want to accurately represent your area of expertise to the public.

PART I: GETTING STARTED

Chapter 1: Deciding to Become a Media Spokesperson

Understanding the pros and cons of being interviewed by the media, whether in print, by radio, on the internet or on television, is your first step to becoming media savvy.

As a psychologist, you are in the unique position of representing not only yourself and your expertise but also your profession. The news media are a critical source of information and education for the public.

Participating in media interviews requires careful preparation. But a good interview can reap the benefit of increased public awareness and understanding of a particular issue germane to your work or to society at large.

Do You Have Something Newsworthy to Say?

Step one toward becoming a media spokesperson is to have something interesting and relevant to say. If you are a researcher, are you studying an area that would intrigue a general audience? If you are a practitioner, can you offer advice and tips based on your experience (without jeopardizing your patients' confidentiality)? Think about how your work as a psychologist might apply to the news of the day. There is a psychological angle to almost everything in the world.

Understanding the Media Landscape

Always remember that the media are in the business of telling stories, and to do that they need content. They are looking for a commodity—your knowledge and expertise. You have a job to do in an interview, and that is to articulate the information you want the audience to understand. The more complex that information, the harder you will have to work to convey it clearly.

Chapter 2: Building Relationships with Journalists

Research the Reporter's Work and Style

The first step toward cultivating a relationship with a reporter is to follow his or her work. Read what she writes or watch his broadcasts. That will help you better understand what a particular reporter looks for to create a story. It will also avoid the embarrassment of pitching a reporter on a story that they have already covered, or a story on a subject they don't cover at all.

Engage on Social Media

Follow reporters you admire and wish to cultivate on social media. Reporters will often tweet about their work and that of other journalists—which is another way for you to become familiar with their work. Many reporters crowdsource stories on Twitter/X and other social media channels, which could provide other inroads for you to pitch ideas or offer yourself as a resource.

If you see a report you particularly like, leave a comment on the webpage saying so. Share the story on your social media channels and don't forget to tag reporters in your tweets so they will be notified that you shared their work.

Explore Podcast Opportunities

Many journalists have podcasts in addition to the other reporting they do. Listen to the podcasts of those you wish to cultivate. Offer yourself as a guest, if appropriate.

Understand Journalism Culture

Don't waste reporters' time. Most reporters lead hectic, deadline-driven professional lives. They are often working on several stories simultaneously, with calls and emails out to

numerous sources. Many of them work different shifts since many newsrooms function around the clock.

Some reporters have specific beats, or areas that they focus on exclusively, while others are on general assignment, which means an editor or producer could tap them to cover a breaking news story. Look up reporters online before you work with them to find out what they cover. Check up on the media outlet where they work so you know if it has a political bent.

Often, it's best to pitch story ideas to reporters via email. That way, they can read your idea when they have time. If you decide to call, make sure the reporter has time to talk to you—and it's best to phone early in the day since by 4 p.m., most dayside reporters are crashing on deadline.

Maintain Professional Relationships

If you work with a reporter on a story that turns out well, make sure to drop a note letting him or her know you appreciated the piece. By the same token, if you see an error in a

story, or if you are misquoted, try to get the mistake corrected during the news cycle when it occurred, if possible, but certainly no later than the next day.

Remember that good reporters are always working. As you become friendlier with journalists, it's easy to let your guard down. Be careful not to say anything to a reporter that you would not want to see on tonight's news or read in tomorrow's newspaper. Even if you try to establish a ground rule that what you are saying is off the record, not all reporters will respect that agreement.

Get to Know Their Personal Interests

Remember, reporters are human and have personal interests that can often be discerned by their social media posts. Getting to know a reporter's personal as well as professional preferences can help you craft more compelling and personalized pitches.

PART II: INTERVIEW FUNDAMENTALS

Chapter 3: Interview Preparation

When a Reporter Calls

If a reporter reaches out to you for an interview, it's important to respond in a timely manner. Often, they will be on deadline and if you don't respond quickly, they will move on to someone else. Your first interaction gives you a chance to gather important information:

- Who is the reporter? Get the correct spelling of their name.
- What is the outlet?
- What is the subject of the interview and why are they working on this story now?
- What expertise are they looking for?
- What is the format (e.g., TV, radio, print, phone/email or online, one-on-one interview or panel discussion, live or recorded)?
- What's the deadline?

Deciding Whether to Accept

This information will help you to determine whether you should do the interview. Ask yourself:

- Am I available and do I have time to prepare?
- What do I want to accomplish with this interview?

- What do I want to say about this subject?
- What do I have to gain by doing it?
- Will there be more opportunities for me in the future?

Interviews to Turn Down

Choose wisely in accepting interviews. You do not need to grant every request.

Carefully consider whether to participate in an interview that:

- would compromise you or your research in any way
- is out of your range of expertise
- is with a medium that has a controversial slant, whether highly left-leaning or right-leaning

If you decide not to accept, tell the media representative as soon as possible. All you need to say is, "No, thank you." You might also say you don't have time or it's not your area of expertise. However, if you are able to recommend a colleague instead, that will help you build a relationship with the reporter.

Developing Your Key Messages

Before you start an interview, know what you want to say. Prepare three to five points you want to make and integrate into answers during the interview. Write them down and practice a few comfortable ways of saying them.

Stories or case studies are useful to support a point, but remember to keep them short. It's important to infuse psychological science into your response, but summarize only—phrases like “the research shows...” or “psychological science tells us that...” are helpful. Also, state your conclusions first, then follow up with your supporting evidence.

If there are any controversial or easily misinterpreted aspects of your work, frame and practice those answers beforehand.

Always speak in plain language during an interview and avoid jargon or overly academic language. A good rule of thumb for an interview is to imagine that you are talking not to your academic peers or a fellow psychologist but to a stranger unfamiliar with your area of expertise.

Chapter 4: The Interview Process

Pre-Interview Preparation

Before you do any interview, think about what you want to say and how you want to be quoted. Don't just answer on the fly because a reporter called you. Say you will get back to them at a specified time. Then, prepare the three to five key points that you intend to make during your interview.

Outlining your main points in advance and sticking to them are key to any successful interview. Practice your talking points out loud in advance. If you have time, ask a colleague or family member to run through a practice interview with you.

During the Interview

Remember that journalists are doing their job by talking to you. They are trying to tell a story and hope you will help them do so. Aggressively steering a reporter away from their main line of questioning can be counterproductive. But if a reporter is going in a wrong direction, present the facts and a fresh perspective as you respond.

Will you receive questions in advance? Sometimes—it's certainly OK to ask or at least ask for an overview of what the reporter is looking for when you set up the interview. Journalists will typically tell you the gist of the story they are after, which will help you shape what you say.

Handling Difficult Questions

Reporters often will ask you to draw conclusions from research that is inconclusive or does not exist. Explain the difference between preliminary research results and “known” behavioral science. Remember that preliminary research is often more interesting and thus more newsworthy than established science.

Reporters may also not understand the difference between causation and correlation. As the psychological scientist, you need to help them understand these concepts.

If a question is beyond your expertise, the best response is, “I don't know,” or “That's not my area.” It can help if you refer the reporter to someone who might be able to answer that question.

Techniques for Difficult Questions:

- Do not repeat the negative premise
- Bridge to your key points using phrases like “what's important here is...” or “what I'm here to talk about is...”

Post-Interview Considerations

Will you get to read a story before it appears in print? Not usually, and some reporters will be offended if you ask. Sometimes, the reporter or a fact checker will run portions or quotes by you to check for accuracy, but typically this only happens in cases when your information is complex. When this happens, they are looking for factual corrections, rather than giving you an opportunity to edit or refine a quote.

Take precautions. If there are any aspects of your work that may easily be misinterpreted, explain that to the reporter, emphasizing that your information may be inaccurate if stated another way.

“Off the Record” and “On Background”

Off the record means what you are telling the reporter cannot be used or referenced in any way.

On background means the reporter can use what you say but not attribute it to you by name. Rather, you might be identified as a “knowledgeable source who declined to be named.” But unless you know the reporter well and are very experienced in dealing with the media, don't try these techniques. Say only what you would be comfortable seeing/hearing in the story.

Chapter 5: Broadcast Interviews (TV, Radio, Podcast)

Television and Radio Interviews

Pre-Interview Process

Given the skills necessary for a good broadcast interview, reporters or producers will often conduct a pre-interview to make sure that you are the right person for a high-profile story.

Treat the pre-interview as seriously as you would the actual interview. This is, in effect, your dress rehearsal and it's your job to convince the reporter or producer that you are the right person to talk to. Be animated and quotable. If you aren't, the journalist will move on to someone else.

Interview Formats

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, many interviews are being conducted from home using technology such as Zoom or Teams rather than having a guest travel to a studio. However, you may still be asked to attend an interview in person.

Radio/audio interviews may take place with video even when only audio is being used. Find out in advance if they will need just audio or video as well. You may also be asked to download an app to your phone to record your part of the conversation.

In-Person Studio Interviews

A media representative will generally contact you to go over more details and/or to make travel arrangements. Major outlets may offer to provide transportation from your location to the studio.

Arrive early and review your prepared statements. (Bring notes.) If you are offered makeup, say yes as it will make your face less shiny under the studio lights.

What to Wear for Video

Aim for conservative, professional clothing in solid colors. Light gray or blue shirts work well, as do dark suits or jackets with solid-colored ties or accessories.

Avoid:

- checks, stripes or other busy patterns
- sunglasses or tinted glasses
- heavy makeup (although powder will help reduce shine under hot studio lights)
- distracting jewelry

Remote Video Interviews

With Zoom, Google Hangouts and other video and audio applications readily available, news outlets can get an expert on the air in a matter of minutes or record them anywhere there's a high-speed internet connection.

Technical Setup

Don't wait until you're on the air to see how you look on the video feed. Practice with a friend or coworker to make sure you and your surroundings look top-notch. Test your lighting and background in advance—is your face clearly visible and well lit? Is the background neutral and without distractions?

When you're being interviewed in a studio, you don't have to worry about the lighting, but over Zoom, you need to be cognizant of your surroundings. If you need to set up near a window, make sure it's not behind you creating glare. Make sure your face is not in shadow. Adjust your camera so you are looking head on.

Audio Considerations

Many laptop webcams are poor quality, so you might want to invest in a high-definition webcam and a better quality microphone, rather than the one built into your laptop.

Be aware of background or outside sounds that could interfere with the interview. If you are in a room with a ceiling fan, make sure it's turned off. Silence your cell phone and any other devices with audible notifications. Tell your family members or others in your home not to interrupt you during the interview.

If you're wearing headphones, choose the wired kind. Wireless headphones can create sound feedback because of their Bluetooth connection. Also, if you're concerned about how headphones look, use ear buds.

Background and Environment

If you're doing an interview from your home or office, be sure to clean up. If you have a poster or sign with your organization's logo, you might try putting it behind you so it's in the shot but not too intrusive. Many people set up in front of bookcases in their home offices so make sure any book spines that are visible are from books that won't be a distraction because of subject matter or author. Avoid using virtual backgrounds; they rarely reproduce well on a big screen.

Turn off email and other desktop notifications that may pop up and distract you during your interview.

Camera Technique

Look at your computer's camera, so it appears to viewers that you are looking at them. Consider putting a bright sticker or other marker next to it to draw your eyes to it. If it's distracting to see yourself on screen, consider covering it up or turning off your monitor, or if your webcam is not built in, move the camera away from the screen so that you look at it directly and not at your image.

Live vs. Recorded Interviews

Find out in advance whether your interview will air live or be recorded to air at a later point. A third possibility is that it could be recorded as if live. When an interview is recorded, the interviewer is likely looking for one or two short sound-bites that will be edited into a longer story.

If you fumble or misspeak during a recorded interview, it's OK to ask to start again or to ask for the question to be repeated. This should be avoided in a live interview, or an interview that is recorded as if live. Live interviews tend to be very short—you may only be on air for a few minutes.

Interview Techniques for Broadcast

- Speak in short, succinct sentences ("sound bites").
- State your overall message followed by the supporting points.

Example: Message: Youth violence is preventable because it is a learned behavior.

- Point 1: "It is important to recognize the early experiences that can lead to violence and confront them. For instance, exposure to violence in the media, effects of prejudice and hostility in the home or community, access to firearms."
- Point 2: "Psychologists are helping to develop school programs that reduce aggression and prevent violence."
- Point 3: "Here are some examples of successful programs that have been implemented in schools and communities across the country." Then name them.

Be animated. Let your passion for your topic show. Natural hand gestures and facial expressions help to highlight your points and show your enthusiasm, which will be reflected in your voice and serve to persuade.

If you are being interviewed in a TV studio, look at the interviewer, and avoid looking into the camera or monitors. You can always ask in advance where they want you to look.

Controlling the Interview: The Pivot

Keep in mind that your knowledge and expertise are what led the journalist to reach out to you.

Know your key points and use them throughout the interview. But if you are not asked the "right" questions, you can help shape the interview in a professional, assertive manner.

You can steer the direction of the interview effectively by using transition phrases:

- "That's a good question, but what is really important is..."
- "I'd like to make this point before I continue."
- "Let me give you the latest information on... that is really interesting."
- "What your readers/viewers may not know is..."

You can then shift the direction of the interview and make one of your points. At the end of the interview, you may be asked "is there anything that I missed?"—always use this as an opportunity to restate one of your key points.

Panel Interviews

If you are part of a discussion panel with other experts, each of you will be competing for airtime.

Ask beforehand who the other panelists will be. Producers will sometimes try to create controversy so consider your comfort level with the other guests before agreeing to a panel interview.

If you aren't being included in the discussion, you don't have to wait to speak until a question is directed to you. You were invited on the program because of your expertise, and you should participate and raise key points or clarify ones made by other panelists when appropriate.

Be assertive; most interview segments last only a few minutes, so claim airtime before the interview is over.

Radio Interviews

Most large cities have a radio station with an all-news or all-talk format. Other radio stations rely on feeds from network newscasts and wire services, which also have broadcast arms.

Many news directors will accept interviews conducted by telephone or via teleconferencing like Zoom or Teams, both live and taped.

In a radio interview, rephrase your important points and say them several times, because radio programs often have listeners tuning in at various times throughout the interview.

Chapter 6: Podcast Interviews

Podcast listenership has grown rapidly in recent years, and podcasts are a great way to reach a wide audience and get your message out to the public.

Podcast interviews share some similarities with television and radio interviews but are usually longer—often half an hour to an hour long—allowing more time for in-depth conversation.

When Producers Approach You

Research the Podcast

- Listen to several episodes to understand the host's style and the show's content.
- Ask the producer or host to describe the show's target audience and how large it is.
- Find out if the podcast is audio-only or whether it will include video.

Pitching Yourself to Podcasts

Find psychology or science podcasts that would be a good fit. For instance, some popular psychology and mental health podcasts include:

- [Speaking of Psychology](#) (APA's flagship podcast)
- [Under the Cortex](#)
- [The Happiness Lab, with Dr. Laurie Santos](#)
- [The Psychology Podcast](#)
- [Hidden Brain](#)
- [Choiceology](#)
- [Psychologists off the Clock](#)

Send a pitch email to the producer, explaining briefly why you would be a good guest. This could include a short bio, links to other interviews you've done, an offer to send your latest book, if you have one, or relevant article(s) you've written.

Preparing for the Interview

Equipment Setup: Most podcasts are recorded remotely, as opposed to in-studio. Find out what recording platform the podcast uses (Zoom, Riverside, etc.). It may be helpful to arrange a pre-interview call or log on to the interview a few minutes early to make sure you're able to connect—particularly if you haven't used the platform before.

Find out what equipment you'll need—generally this entails good headphones, a decent microphone, a computer and an internet connection. Test your equipment and connection ahead of time. Use the best quality microphone you have available.

Content Preparation: Some podcast producers and hosts will send questions ahead of time, others will not. Either way, think about the questions that they are likely to ask you and the messages you'd like to convey. It may be helpful to prepare talking points, anecdotes, etc., ahead of time.

During the Interview

Environment Setup: Find a quiet space to record. In general, small rooms with low ceilings, carpet, curtains and other sound-dampening qualities work best.

If the podcast will include video, consider your background and the position of your camera and microphone. (All of the technical guidelines from the remote interview section apply to video podcast interviews.)

Minimize distractions. Turn off your cellphone or set it to silent and turn off notifications. Close other tabs and browsers on your computer. Inform other people nearby (in your home or office) that you'll be conducting an interview. Turn off appliances such as fans, dishwasher or anything else that might make noise in the background.

Interview Style: Unlike most television or radio interviews, podcast hosts and producers will not be looking for sound bites—you will have more time for in-depth discussion. However, aim to keep your answers lively and accessible, and avoid using technical language or jargon.

Podcasts are generally recorded and not live. Confirm with the interviewer, but it is possible that if you need to restate an answer or need a question repeated, the podcast sound editor will be able to correct it in editing.

After the Interview

Promotion: Ask the producer or host to let you know when the episode will post. Share the episode link on your social media channels and website if you have one.

Supporting Materials: If you discussed specific research studies, resources or other materials during the interview, send them to the producer to include in the show notes.

Chapter 7: Letters to the Editor

One of the most widely read sections of the newspaper is the Letters to the Editor page. A letter to the editor allows readers to express their opinion on a hot topic, add an additional point of view regarding a recent article, or correct or clarify an inaccurate or misleading story. But because letters are so popular, there is a lot of competition to get letters published.

Research Publication Guidelines

These are often found on the opinion or letters page, either in print or online. Different newspapers and magazines have different rules regarding what they will accept, what contact information they need, and the maximum length. Find the guidelines and follow them to avoid being immediately rejected. If guidelines are not available, the rule of thumb is that shorter is better. Many publications will not run letters longer than 250 words.

Writing Effective Letters

Be Timely: Your letter has the best chance of being published if it is in reaction to a story or column in the paper. Respond as quickly as you can—the day the story runs is ideal but certainly within a few days of the story's or column's publication. Editors are most likely to run one of the first letters they receive in response to a story.

Be Specific and Brief: Stick to one main point. If the publication wants no more than 250 words, and you made your point in 150, it's OK to stop writing. If you want to write something that is longer than a few paragraphs, you will probably need to write a commentary piece, or op-ed.

Follow Publication Style: Become familiar with the types of letters the paper publishes. If your letter is in response to a specific story, cite the headline and date within your letter. ("While many people admit that they are suffering from extreme stress, as reported in 'Americans More Stressed than Ever' (November 27), we must also recognize that...")

Localize Your Content: Your personal experiences and expertise are often worth adding. So are local statistics or any details to localize the issue.

Use Your Expertise: If there is psychological science behind your main point, cite it. If your being a psychologist adds heft to your views, note it. If you are responding in a professional capacity—e.g., as a psychology professor or other official—note that, as long as you have clearance from your employer to use your affiliation.

Submission Process

Prepare to be contacted. The publication will want to verify that you are who you say you are and that you wrote the letter. Give your name, address, email address, and phone number. Newspapers do not publish anonymous letters.

Remember to proofread. While editors can and will edit your letter to correct grammar or cut down the length, make sure you catch any typos or other errors before sending it. And don't be offended if the publication edits your letter; it's not personal.

Chapter 8: Op-Ed Writing

Op-ed is newspaper shorthand for opposite the editorial because traditionally, opinion pieces have been printed on the page opposite the newspaper's editorials. Op-eds are not news pieces, they are the writer's opinion, usually on a timely topic and in an area where the writer has expertise or special knowledge. If you have an interesting opinion to share and can express it clearly and persuasively in about 750 words, you may reach millions of people, change minds, and perhaps even reshape public policy.

Essential Elements

Have a News Hook: News outlets are much more likely to accept a piece about a topic that's in the news. Readers want your perspective on something they're already reading about, so try to tie your topic to something already in the public eye. Keep in mind that timeliness is everything in the news business so try to capitalize on what's happening in the world—or your state or town—right now.

Tailor to Your Audience: If you're submitting to a local newspaper, they're typically looking for op-eds that are relevant to their community, so include local influences on or consequences of the issue. You can also emphasize your personal connections—many op-ed editors prefer authors who live locally or who have other local connections.

Research Your Target Outlets: We all want to be published in The New York Times, but consider a range of outlets and get familiar with where you'll submit your op-ed. Outlets like Psychology Today and HuffPost are always looking for content. Local or regional newspapers are also looking for diverse voices. Read the outlet to which you're submitting to get a sense of its style, voice and tone. Most newspapers have op-ed word limits of around 750 words, so you'll have to be concise.

Writing Techniques

Write Simply: Make your points clearly and concisely. Use short sentences and paragraphs. Think about how you would talk to your parents, grandparents or next-door neighbor. Ask a nonacademic friend to critique your draft and make sure it is free of confusing language, abbreviations, or unfamiliar terms.

Lead with Your Main Point: In academia, scientists lay out the groundwork that supports their ideas before they articulate their conclusions. But in an op-ed, that order is reversed. Start with your key point and then unpack it for readers. You have to grab readers' attention from the get-go and convince them that you have something to say.

Limit Your Focus: Three points are usually the limit. Considering the amount of space you have, don't try to pack in too much. By limiting the points you are trying to make, you will increase the likelihood that your work will be used because your writing will be tighter.

Finish Strong: In addition to having a strong opening paragraph to hook readers, it's important to summarize your argument in a powerful final paragraph. That's because many casual readers scan the headline, skim the opening, and then read the final paragraph and byline.

Use Stories Over Statistics: Statistics are OK in moderation, but stories capture readers' attention—most of us remember narratives and colorful details better than numbers. Bring your examples to life. Include details—what something smelled like, looked like, felt like. Embrace personal experiences. Use the active voice. (Not "Mistakes happened," but "I made mistakes.") And remember: You're not writing an academic article.

Make It Relevant: Put yourself in the place of the busy person looking at your article. Ask aloud: "So what? Who cares?" You need to answer these questions. If you describe a problem, propose a solution. Don't be satisfied with analysis. How should your town help those in deep poverty? How can we solve the problem of racism?

Submission Strategy

Ensure Exclusivity: Don't submit your op-ed to multiple outlets simultaneously, thinking that this will increase your chances of getting it published. Most newspapers insist on exclusivity. If you don't hear back from an editor within a week of submitting, follow up with an email asking if a decision has been made because you'd like to submit the piece elsewhere.

Follow Submission Guidelines: Almost all outlets post guidelines about how they prefer to receive op-ed submissions. In general, they provide an email address where you can submit the article electronically, but check first. Always be sure to include your contact information and say whether you have a head shot of yourself available (and to which you have the rights).

Don't Give Up: If you have not heard back in three to five days, it's OK to email the outlet to find out if they are passing or still considering publication. If that does not elicit an answer, let them know that you plan to submit the piece elsewhere—and then do so. It is not uncommon to have to submit a piece to several outlets before one accepts it. Keep in mind, most major newspapers and magazines receive hundreds of submissions so don't take rejection or silence personally.

After Publication: If your op-ed is published, share it on social media. Consider sending a copy to your legislator and/or other affected parties in your state or town.

PART V: DIGITAL MEDIA AND SOCIAL PLATFORMS

Chapter 9: Social Media Strategy for Psychologists

More than half of Americans say they get their news from social media at least some of the time, making social media platforms key for psychologists who want to share their message broadly. Especially with the spread of misinformation across social media platforms, psychologists play an important role in sharing accurate, research-based information with a variety of audiences, including the lay public, journalists, other scientists and policymakers.

Platform Strategy

The distinctions among various social media networks can be confusing even to digital natives. But rather than try to keep up with a constantly evolving digital landscape, it's better to choose a few social media platforms that meet your needs and build your profile there.

Unlike traditional media where you often need to rely on a reporter, editor or producer to develop a story that includes your work or viewpoint, social media allows you to speak directly to your audience. The trick is to take the time and

effort to build a following and regularly post information that will keep them interested and engaged. It is also important to tailor your strategy for each platform's particular audiences, rather than share the same messages across every site.

Core Principles for Psychology Professionals

Make it Professional Yet Accessible: Your content should reflect your expertise while remaining engaging for non-specialists. Share insights from psychological research, but translate complex concepts into everyday language.

Build Credibility Through Consistency: Regular posting and professional interaction establish you as a reliable source. Share evidence-based information and cite research when appropriate, but keep explanations brief and clear.

Engage Meaningfully: Don't just broadcast—participate in conversations. Respond to questions, share others' good work, and contribute to discussions in your areas of expertise.

Maintain Ethical Boundaries: Remember your professional obligations. Never provide individual therapy or diagnosis through social media. Keep general advice clearly distinguished from professional treatment.

Platform-Specific Strategies

Professional Networks (LinkedIn): LinkedIn's professionally-oriented audience makes it ideal for sharing research findings, professional insights, and connecting with colleagues and journalists. Posts can be longer and more detailed than on other platforms.

Use LinkedIn to:

- Share research publications and their implications
- Comment on psychology-related news and policy
- Connect with journalists who cover psychology
- Build professional networks with other researchers and practitioners

Public Discussion Platforms (X/Twitter, Threads, Bluesky): These platforms excel for real-time conversation and connecting with journalists, policymakers, and the general public. Keep posts concise and use relevant hashtags to increase visibility.

Effective strategies:

- Follow and engage with psychology journalists
- Share brief insights on trending topics that relate to psychology

- Use hashtags like #SciComm and #Psychology to reach broader audiences
- Participate in Twitter chats related to mental health and science communication

Visual Platforms (Instagram, TikTok): These platforms work well for making psychology concepts accessible through visual storytelling. Consider creating infographics that explain research findings or short videos that debunk psychology myths.

Content ideas:

- Infographics explaining psychological concepts
- Short videos addressing common misconceptions
- Behind-the-scenes content about research processes
- Visual summaries of key research findings

Long-Form Content (YouTube, Podcasts): These platforms allow for in-depth exploration of psychological topics and can help establish you as a thought leader in your field.

Building Your Following

Start by Following Others: Find and follow psychologists, scientists, journalists, and organizations whose work you respect. Engage with their content thoughtfully.

Share Quality Content: Mix your own insights with sharing others' excellent work. This establishes you as a curator of good information, not just a self-promoter.

Be Patient and Persistent: Building a meaningful social media presence takes time. Focus on providing value to your audience rather than growing follower numbers quickly.

Maintain Regular Activity: Most algorithms favor active accounts. Even 5-10 minutes daily of engagement can help maintain your visibility.

Professional Considerations for Psychologists

Avoid Individual Diagnosis or Treatment: Make clear distinctions between general psychological information and individual clinical advice. Use disclaimers when appropriate.

Maintain Professional Standards: Your social media presence reflects on the psychology profession. Maintain the same ethical standards online that you would in any professional setting.

Handle Sensitive Topics Carefully: When discussing mental health topics, be mindful of potentially vulnerable followers. Provide resources and encourage professional help when appropriate.

Protect Client Confidentiality: Never discuss specific cases or clients, even in hypothetical terms. Keep all examples general and clearly fictional.

PART VI: PROFESSIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

Chapter 10: Ethical Guidelines for Media Work

When working with the media, you should consider your obligations under the APA Ethics Code. Psychologists should always use their judgment when talking to media and if you are faced with complex or difficult scenarios, consider seeking additional guidance from the APA Ethics office, your state, provincial or territorial psychological association's Ethics Committee or from colleagues and mentors.

Common Ethical Scenarios

Requests to Interview Patients

To make a story more compelling, reporters often look for a human interest angle, which might entail trying to talk to a person or several people with a diagnosed mental illness. In such cases, a reporter might ask you to put them in touch with one or more of your patients, or to discuss patients you have treated.

While this scenario is not directly addressed in the Ethics Code, section 5.05 on testimonials is relevant:

5.05 Psychologists do not solicit testimonials from current therapy clients/patients or other persons who because of their particular circumstances are vulnerable to undue influence.

Considerations for Patient Interviews:

- Can you be sure that your patient has the autonomy to decline your invitation? Do they feel obligated to consent?
- If your patient is interviewed, how will an interview affect them? (Note that neither you nor your patient will have control over how the story turns out.)
- Even if your patient has given informed consent to be interviewed alone or with you, how will this affect the professional relationship?

Rather than connecting the reporter with a patient, you might refer them to a consumer or patient advocacy organization, such as Mental Health America. It's appropriate to discuss

issues you encounter in your practice in general terms without jeopardizing anyone's confidentiality.

Call-In Shows and Live Advice

Many talk radio shows have listeners call in, often live on-air, to ask questions of a studio guest or expert, such as a psychologist. These formats raise the issue of whether a client/therapist relationship is created during such interactions.

Best Practices:

- Make clear that you are not offering treatment or a diagnosis
- Explain that although you are a psychologist, you are not the listener's or viewer's psychologist
- Offer general advice and tips based on psychological principles
- Encourage listeners to see a licensed mental health professional for individual concerns
- Stick to the same approach you would use when friends ask for informal advice

Diagnosing Public Figures

Reporters often ask psychologists to explain high-profile news stories involving human behavior, which may include requests to comment on the mental health of celebrities or politicians.

Ethical Guidelines:

- You cannot diagnose someone you have not examined
- If you were treating the individual, confidentiality would prevent discussion
- Make clear you can only speak generally about psychological conditions
- Use language like: "I can't comment directly about [specific person], nor can I make a diagnosis based on media reports, but I can tell you that individuals with [relevant condition] typically experience..."
- Research the outlet and interviewer beforehand to avoid sensationalistic contexts

Paid Interviews and Advertising

Be cautious of requests that blur the line between editorial content and advertising. The Ethics Code states:

Psychologists do not compensate employees of press, radio, television or other communication media in return for publicity in a news item. A paid advertisement relating to psychologists' activities must be identified or clearly recognizable as such. (APA Ethics Code 5.02 b) and c)

If approached by advertising departments suggesting you pay for coverage or that advertising purchases will result in editorial coverage, decline these arrangements.

Chapter 11: Correcting Errors and Managing Problems

Handling Misquotes and Inaccuracies

Most journalists strive for accuracy in their reporting, but you may be misquoted at some point. These errors are rarely deliberate. Your concern should be that the meaning of what you said to the reporter was conveyed accurately, not so much whether the exact words were used.

When to Request Corrections:

If the reporter completely missed the point of your statements

In cases of serious misstatement of your data or views

When errors could mislead the public about important psychological concepts

How to Handle Corrections:

- Contact the reporter as soon as possible after the error appears
- Be helpful rather than confrontational in your approach
- Request correction during the news cycle when the error occurred, if possible
- Follow up no later than the next day

Preventing Misunderstandings

A common error when being interviewed on television is allowing a reporter's false or inaccurate statements to stand uncorrected. Always speak up when you hear inaccurate information.

Techniques:

- If a reporter begins with a false premise, correct that first, then reframe and answer the question
- If a reporter cites unfamiliar information or statistics, don't assume they're accurate—simply state you're unfamiliar with that information
- Take precautions by explaining to reporters if aspects of your work might be easily misinterpreted

PART VII: RESOURCES AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Chapter 12: Media Training and Skill Development

Professional Development Opportunities

Take advantage of any media training opportunities that are available to you through your institution or other professional organizations. With each workshop or lecture, you will learn something new and helpful.

APA Resources

APA has online media training resources:

- [Video/Webinar recording: Media Training for Scientists](#)
- [Video/Webinar recording: Give a TEDx talk as a psychologist](#)
- [Video/Webinar recording: Give a great research talk](#)

- [Video/Webinar recording: Supercharge Your Slides](#)
- [Video/Webinar recording: Public Speaking](#)
- [Video/Webinar recording: Writing for the Web](#)

External Training Resources

- [SciLine Media Training](#)
- [Alda Center for Communicating Science](#)
- [Science Communication Course](#)
- [Compass Science Communication](#)

Chapter 13: APA Support Services

Media Referral Service

APA has long been journalists' go-to source for psychology experts on hundreds of subjects. The Public Affairs Office

maintains a Media Referral Service, a database of some 2,000 psychologists who can speak knowledgeably on about 1,000 aspects of human behavior and psychology. Thousands of journalists call APA each year and the Public Affairs Office uses the service to recommend sources for them to speak with.

If you want to apply to be a member of the service, [access the MRS application form](#). The form asks for your professional background, areas of expertise and relevant publications, as well as any previous experience working with the media, all of which are reviewed before APA staff add psychologists to the database.

QUICK REFERENCE GUIDES

Interview Preparation Checklist

Before Accepting:

- ☐ Who is the reporter and outlet?
- ☐ What is the subject and news hook?
- ☐ What format (print, radio, TV, podcast)?
- ☐ What's the deadline?
- ☐ Do I have relevant expertise?
- ☐ Do I have time to prepare adequately?

Message Development:

- ☐ Identify 3-5 key points
- ☐ Practice stating points concisely
- ☐ Prepare supporting examples/stories
- ☐ Anticipate difficult questions
- ☐ Practice bridging phrases

Technical Setup (for remote interviews):

- ☐ Test camera and microphone
- ☐ Check lighting and background
- ☐ Eliminate background noise
- ☐ Have backup connection method
- ☐ Close unnecessary applications

Media Interview Self-Evaluation

After Each Interview:

- ☐ Did I make my key points?
- ☐ Did I control the interview effectively?
- ☐ Was I succinct and quotable?
- ☐ Did I avoid jargon?
- ☐ Did I correct any misinformation?
- ☐ What would I do differently next time?