

„SCIENTISTS FROM BRNO  
HAVE DISCOVERED...“

or

**How to get  
the science from  
the Brno University  
of Technology out  
into the media**





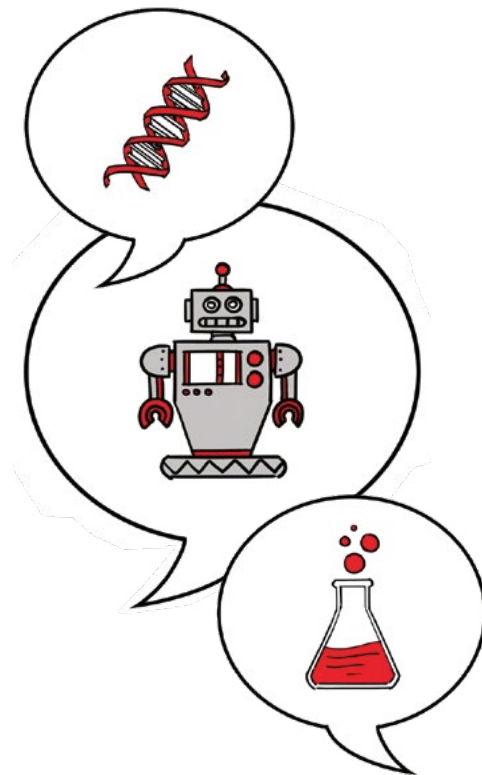
...the goal of science  
is to acquire new  
knowledge that is beautiful  
either in and of itself  
or due to the utility  
that it brings people.

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JUNGWIRTH, Pavel. Malý princ a věda. Respekt [online]. 25. 3. 2017 [cit. 2021-7-29].  
Available from: [https://www.respekt.cz/tydenik/2017/13/maly-princ-a-veda?\\_fid=dw5b](https://www.respekt.cz/tydenik/2017/13/maly-princ-a-veda?_fid=dw5b)

But what if the public does not know very much about science, technology or art? Casting the blame on journalists and the media does not help anything. We should start with ourselves and learn how better to speak about science with the public. If we are able to intelligibly explain what we are working on and why it is important to the public, science may be given greater space and not only in the media.

We want to show you in this handbook that popularisation and communicating with journalists is not rocket science. It can also be fun and a skill that can come in handy.



# Is my topic of interest to the media?

If a journalist is going to want to work with the topic of your research, it has to comply with the following points:

## Topicality

Findings that are a couple of years old are of no interest to anyone. The important thing is what is happening now – the start of some interesting research, the latest prototype, some

surprising results or a new collaboration. You can also update an older topic – if roads have been cracking in summer, revive the topic of new road repair methods.



## Distinctiveness

Why should reporters film something with you rather than with another research team? Are you the first to do something or somehow unique? Have you taken a different approach than that of the “competition”? It is not necessary to be absolutely unique, but you do need to explain where your merits lie.

## Conciseness and keeping it simple

Would you be able simply describe the main idea behind your research to your aunt or to your friends over a beer? Don't worry about what your colleagues might think about your

use of layman's language. Explaining a complicated topic in a simple way is much more demanding than reverting to formulae and expert terms.

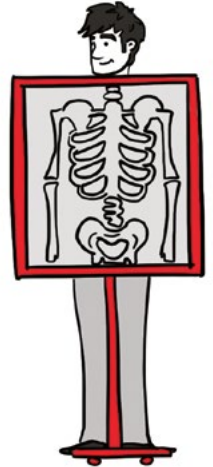


## Simplicity

Answer the simple questions. What? Who? Why? Where? Why? The reporter does not need any more information and those watching will not be able to retain any more detailed information. Instead of numerical data, try using specific comparisons – for example, with an area of three football fields. This may sound somewhat banal, but people will be better able to imagine it. How long does it take a bottle made of your biodegradable material to decompose in nature? A reporter does not want to hear that it is difficult to estimate.

## The benefits for mankind

What is in it for the non-scientific public? Why should a report be read or viewed by a person who is not a scientist? The research should be focussed on improving human lives and as such, you should use illustrative examples. Prepare yourself for the reporter to ask "what is it good for?"



## On-screen attraction

Even though it is sometimes not possible, it is always better if there is something to photograph and film. If you are speaking about new 3D printing technology, television will want footage of working printers and new products. And they will also want to film you; you don't need an academic gown or a suit – just a clean t-shirt, preferably without anything written on it.

## A willingness to speak with the media

So you don't feel like speaking with reporters? That would be a pity. Just as your interesting research cannot be done without you, the same applies to the creation of any report or article about it. If you don't feel comfortable in the spotlight, you can take heart from the fact that it will get easier with each subsequent interview. If you are still unsure, you can have a colleague from your team represent you.



# Why should I do it at all?

That's something you are possibly asking yourself. You teach, publish, lead teams and work on projects... Why do you also need to endeavour to popularise science in the media when you already have all that other work to do?

Promotion in the media has its benefits: **you may attract the interest of the right people and acquire investments or grants. Or you may establish new collaborations** and not just with other companies and institutions, but also with other scientific teams. One article in Reuters can easily bring you international scientific collaboration and as such a greater readership and further financing.

Nowadays, compulsory publicity is also a commonplace part of projects. If you had to pay for media support out of your own pocket, you would not be able to.

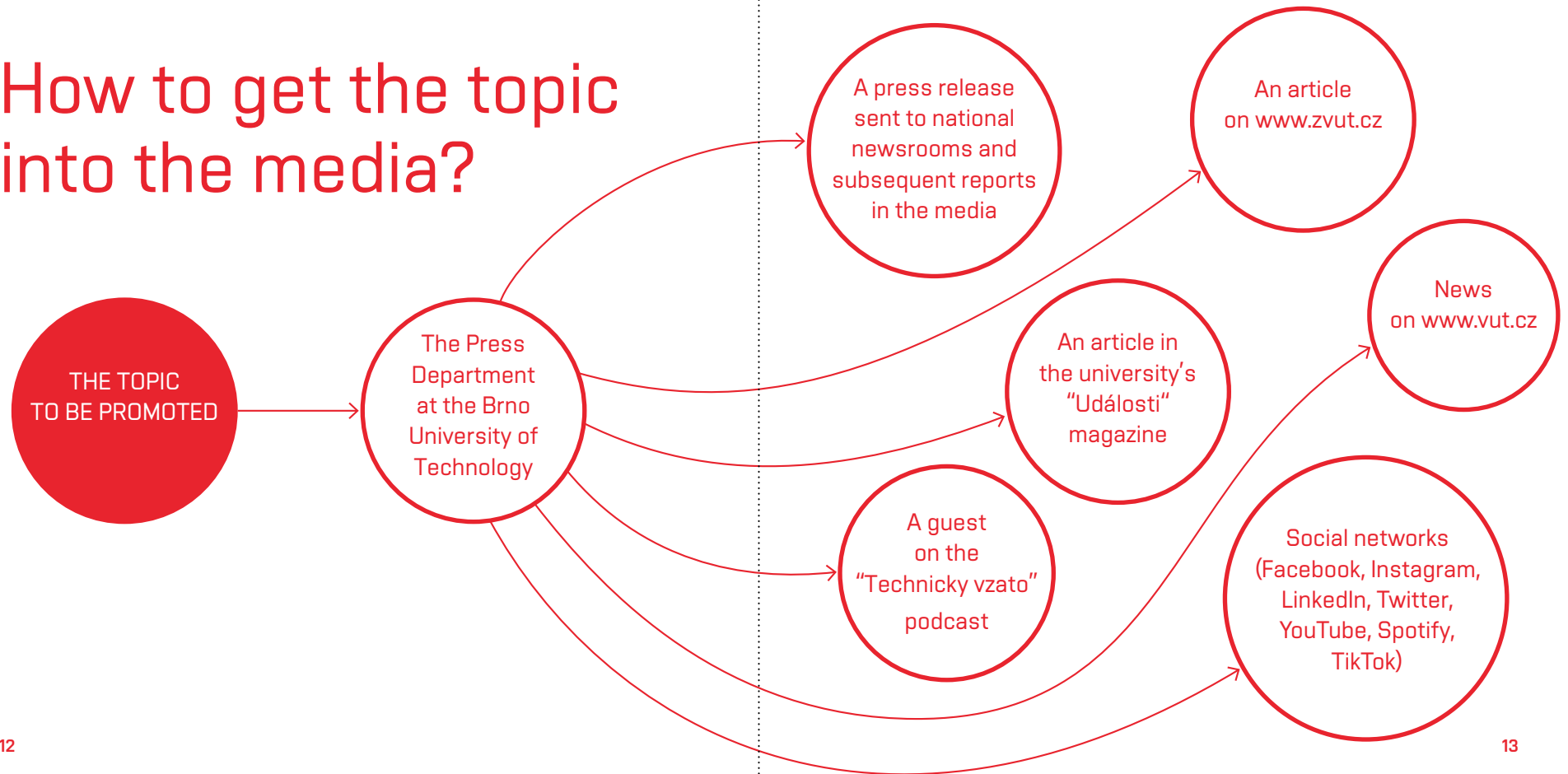
In the end, a journalist will always find somebody to talk to them about the given topic. After all, it is their job to fill up column inches or broadcasting time. **If you are the one who makes the statement, you can prevent self-appointed pseudo-experts from disseminating their opinions.** You will be helping science by doing so.



"Nothing in science has any value to society, if it is not communicated."

**Anne Roe,**  
an American  
psychologist

# How to get the topic into the media?





The Brno University of Technology has its own Press Department. Just send us a tip concerning the topic and we will take care of the rest for you. You don't have to write your own articles – it is sufficient to submit a brief summary, in which you set out your project and its unique aspects in layman's terms.

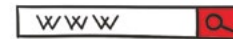


You can send  
your tips to us at  
[media@vut.cz](mailto:media@vut.cz)

The Marketing Department at the Brno University of Technology has a range of communication channels at its disposal that it can use to inform the world about your research. **So don't hesitate to entrust the promotion of your work to our team.** You are experts in science and we are experts in communication.

**Reporters are engulfed with hundreds of emails every day and for that reason they prefer telephone calls.** Be ready for the fact that they will want a telephone number where they will be able to contact you. Are you prepared to make time for a journalist once the press report has been issued? You may be contacted by a large number of journalists after the offer of your topic has been sent to the newsrooms.

**Would you like to see all the places where your story has appeared?** Journalists do not always have the capacity to send the resulting report or article to all their contributors. So, you can directly contact [media@vut.cz](mailto:media@vut.cz). The media monitoring that we perform every day for the university means that we can always find your story, including retroactively.



# What you need to know about journalists

**Reporters** regularly write up several stories a day and so **they have to be able to find their feet quickly in practically every field.** Most newsrooms don't have reporters who specialise in specific areas; for example, in education and science. As such, a reporter has to write an article about a court dispute in the morning, about an archaeological finding at lunchtime and about a medical discovery in the evening. They aren't specialists, but they have an excellent general knowledge.

Reporters have usually spent years studying their field – journalism. Like you, they are experts in their field. They know how best to communicate a topic and present it to their readers, listeners or watchers. It isn't necessary to tell them how to do their jobs.

**Topics in the news are planned up to a maximum of one day in advance,** because it is difficult to estimate what will happen in the next week.

Most newsrooms don't have enough people and one reporter has to submit six articles or three reports daily. Their work tempo is high and they usually have around 30 minutes to acquire the basic material on the story. Try not to hold up the reporters with any unnecessary details or stories of your personal life – they will appreciate your professionalism.

**The media reacts immediately.** Reporters will start calling you as soon as the press release reaches their newsroom. It is therefore necessary to answer their phone calls straight away and not to leave it till the following day to get back to them. As soon as one newsroom files the story, the others will lose interest. There is nothing older than yesterday's news.

Reporters have to work on a wide range of stories every day. It is also possible that a sudden exceptional event will cause the filming of your story to be cancelled or rescheduled for a later date. It is necessary to reckon with this and not to take it personally.

**Nobody has any legal entitlement to authorisation.** The Press Act does not contain any such right and it is therefore merely up to the good will of the journalist whether or not they send you an advance copy of the text for authorisation. They will usually do so, if they have time. However, they will then expect a quick response and merely a check of the facts – not the rewriting of the entire report according to your wishes. Reporters are under pressure from their editors to hand in their pieces on time and in an attractive form.

# A journalist has come to see you – what now?

A journalist is a professional, so be an equal partner to them. To start with, it is necessary to be aware of one absolutely fundamental fact; you are experts in your fields, while the reporter is an expert in journalism. Avoid telling them how to film their report and what they should focus on. Focus only on what you want to tell the public.

A pleasant mood will not only ensure a good report, but will also open the door for you to make further media appearances, either in other reports or as appearances in live broadcasts.

**If the journalist wants to film the story with you, you must reckon with the fact that it will take place straight away.** Not in a month or a week, but preferably on the next day.



The prepared are never surprised. If the filming is going to take place in your laboratory, **get the devices and displays ready and think about the critical points that should be contained in the report** (Who? What? When? Where? Why?). The reporter will talk to you in advance to find out what they should know. There is never time to unpack and dust off your microscopes during filming.

## A PRACTICAL TIP

Television appreciates working machines, radio likes interesting sounds and newspapers want top quality photographs. Keep this in mind.

When doing a report that will usually be broadcast on television on the same day or come out in a newspaper on the following day, you have the option of correcting yourself or redoing a statement or a recording on the spot. Make use of this option, if you think that you could have said something better. **Don't read off a piece of paper – speak naturally.** On the other hand, you do not have the option of making corrections during live broadcasts on radio or television and that is why preparation is very important. **The reporter should always go through the questions with you in advance.**

A reporter can make mistakes in their report, if they have failed to correctly understand the story. Be sure to avoid this possibility and explain everything carefully. **If you don't wish**

**anyone to misinterpret your research, be sure not to leave any questions hanging in the air.** Don't worry – you're not in front of a scientific panel and your colleagues will appreciate your ability to promote your research comprehensibly and simply. If your statement is overly long-winded and specialised, the reporter will never contact you again.

30 minutes of filming = 30 seconds of a report. **Don't expect that everything you say on camera will be included in the report.** Broadcasting time and column space are expensive. Be factual, if you want something specific to appear in the report.

The story should be discussed by somebody who has actually worked on it and not by somebody who has merely formally led the work.

Public media cannot mention or promote commercial entities by law. If you are cooperating, for example, with the TESCAN company, you can only mention it as a producer of electron microscopes from Brno. Or you can omit any mention of it at all.

**Be pleasant and helpful. Come on time and adhere to the agreement.** Don't complain about your colleagues or your employer and never berate the media in front of reporters. On the contrary, it is a good idea to mention another of your projects or to highlight what your colleagues are working on. Build good relations with journalists. They are the ones who decide what their other reports will be about.

Journalists' plans change from minute to minute. Don't be upset with

them, if they cancel the filming at the last minute. Being up-to-date is the first principle of journalism and this unfortunately means that science sometimes has to wait.

**Academic titles are not used in the news** – instead of associate professors or professors, there are laboratory heads, researchers or simply scientists. Don't try to force any project numbers into the text or the broadcast. Journalists don't like the so-called language of Brussels and most mere mortals have no idea about what the projects are.

The participants, including you, are not paid any remuneration for doing filming a report. Media space is expensive. **Consider it a free advertisement for you, your project and the university.**

# And what happens then?

If you communicate well with the journalist, they may store you in their contacts and contact you again in the future. Feel free to let us know, if this occurs, because this contact occurs outside the auspices of the Press Department at the Brno University of Technology.

All it takes is just one sentence to [media@vut.cz](mailto:media@vut.cz)



**Popular interviewees are often contacted directly, including with regard to more general topics.** Even though this involves small media appearances, it is an excellent idea to try and make time for reporters and to answer their questions intelligibly.

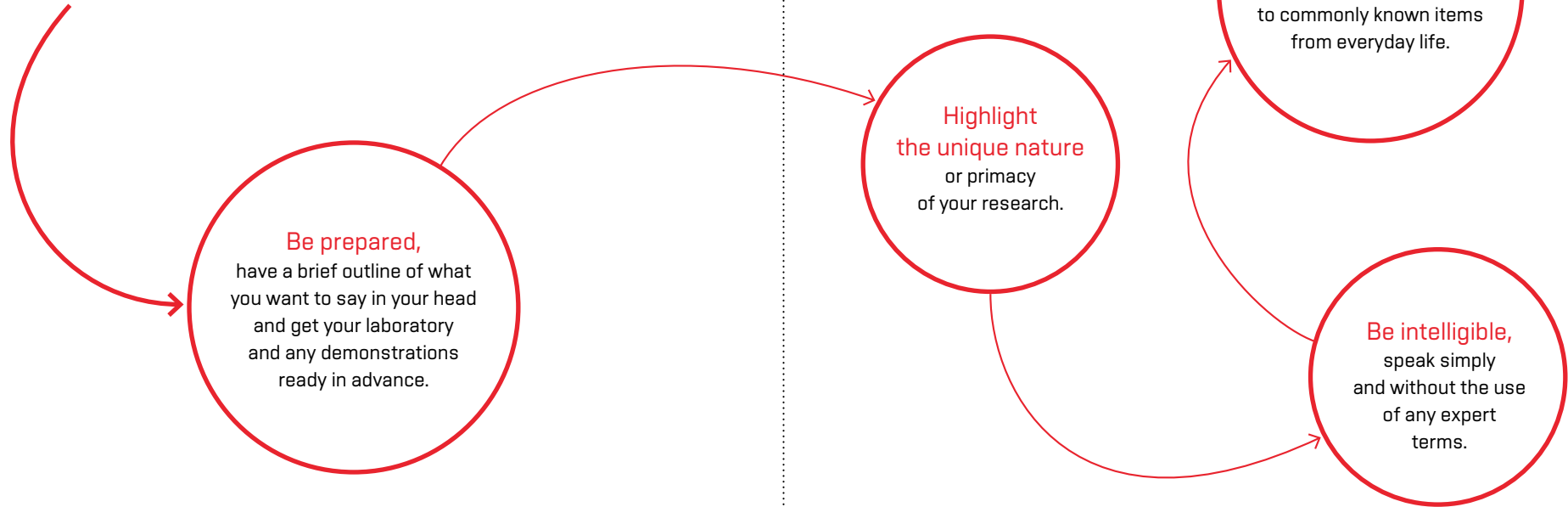
A disadvantage of media popularity lies in the fact that the public may get the impression that you can also resolve their individual problems. Despite your saying that you are working on a prototype, people may

contact you to ask where they can buy it. Count on this happening and be patient.

However, the positives definitely outweigh the negatives. **By promoting your work** in the mainstream media **you are helping to not only increase your own visibility, but also that of your team and your entire field of science.**

This may be how potential aspirants or the public learn of it for the first time. As such, you are helping science as a whole. And we thank you for that.

# The Ten Commandments



**Be helpful**  
and try to understand  
the journalists'  
needs.

**Think about  
ordinary people**  
and what they will get  
from it.

**Tell a story.**  
People like interesting  
and personal narratives,  
for example how a love  
of building things out of Lego  
led you to design  
skyscrapers.

**Be flexible**  
and understand that  
a journalist will never cancel  
an interview with you on a whim.  
Suggest a different time  
and date.

**Don't tell  
the journalist  
how to do their job,**  
and don't complain about  
the media in front  
of them.

**Treat the promotion  
and popularisation of  
science as something fun**  
and another exceptional skill  
where there is room  
to improve.



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