

# How to write for The Conversation

## About The Conversation

The Conversation (theconversation.com) is a daily independent news and analysis online publication, delivering expertise from the academic and research community directly to the public. In a not-for-profit collaboration, our small team of professional editors works directly with academics and researchers to publish articles for a wide audience.

The Conversation Canada (theconversation.com/ca) is the sixth national edition of the global Conversation network. Since its launch in Australia in 2011, The Conversation has expanded to the UK, the US, France and Africa, as well as a global site.

The network has more than 85 commissioning editors and nearly 50,000-plus academics registered as contributors, of whom more than 400 are based in Canada. Each article is written by scholars in their area of expertise, published under Creative Commons and freely available to be republished.

Currently, The Conversation site attracts 4.8 million users per month, and reaches 35 million through Creative Commons republication. Over 22,000 media outlets around the world use content from The Conversation, including The Washington Post, Maclean's, Le Monde, The Guardian, Time Magazine and The Hindu. These numbers continue to grow, and we are excited to work with you.

## Can you write for us?

To be a lead author on an article, **you must be a current researcher or academic.** Associate, adjunct or honorary roles with universities are usually fine. We do not publish articles written by employees of independent research companies or think tanks. Some people without a current academic/research affiliation can be contributors (not coauthors), but an academic or researcher must be the lead author. **We do not publish paid or unpaid PR.**

We aim to provide a fact-based, editorially independent forum. That's why our **disclosure process** (covered in more detail later) is so important, so readers can know who has funded your work, whether you have any relevant political affiliations, or whether there may be any other possible conflicts of interest.

**Undergraduate students or masters candidates** are published if they are writing as a co-author with a current researcher or academic.

### Quick checklist:

- Are you an academic or researcher?
- If not, do you have a current academic/researcher as your lead author?
- Can you answer a simple, three-step disclosure statement?

We are not a traditional op-ed publication. We want our articles to feature the author's own scholarship, research and publications – the material should be referenced and

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linked as much as possible. What we do is explanatory journalism – illuminating events in the news with academics’ expertise and introducing new ideas.

We have a rigorous editing process – with at least two editors reading every piece – who ensure that pieces are both authoritative and accessible to the average reader. We also strive to turn around pieces quickly, particularly if the topic is time-sensitive, so we ask authors to be prepared for queries. We offer a collaborative editorial process and authors have final approval over the finished product, including headlines and photos.

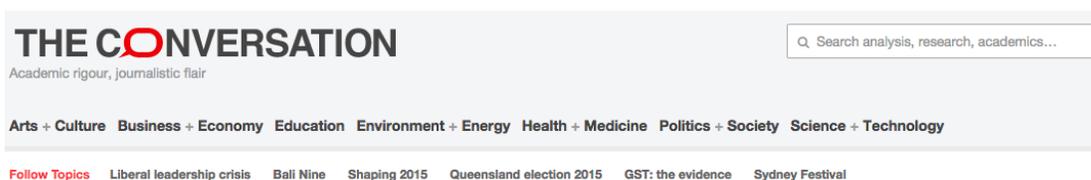
After publication, we promote our articles extensively through various forms of social media as well as through republication under our Creative Commons license. Our articles are regularly republished widely. Over 22,000 media outlets around the world use content from The Conversation, including The Washington Post, Maclean’s, Le Monde, The Guardian, Time Magazine and The Hindu. Every author has their own “dashboard” where you can track how many people are reading your piece, in what publications and in what countries.

## How do articles end up on The Conversation?

We publish articles that are pitched to us and accepted. Or we send queries to individual academics, either directly via an email query or through the “call out,” a request for experts sent out to university communications teams every day. The call out details what sort of expert we’re looking for and the story or topic we’re pursuing (for instance, an expert on Syrian refugees.)

## Save yourself time before pitching a story

- **Read before you write.** What kind of stories do we cover? Do you think yours would work for a broad Canadian and international audience, written and edited in plain English? Have a quick look through our sections.



- **Have you done a quick keyword search?**

- **Is this your area of expertise?**
- **Pay attention to the news.** What are people talking about?
- **Do you know something no one else knows?** Is it the kind of thing the general public – not just other specialists – might be interested in?

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- **Have you discovered something new** that significantly changes the way we think about or understand a wider issue?
- **Can you translate tricky issues for others?** Have you read an important document no one else understands? (For example, a recent report that could be explained in more colloquial language to non-experts?)

An easy way to know what we publish is to subscribe to our email newsletter. You can quickly scan its headlines, read about new research, and know what others in your field are writing about.

Sign up for our newsletter here: <https://theconversation.com/ca/newsletter>

## **Our audience: broad-based and growing**

Our audience is broad. A survey of The Conversation US audience shows that the majority of our readers are not academics. Readers include policymakers, journalists, businesspeople, students and people who are simply curious and in search of informed analysis.

A broad readership means that we don't assume expert knowledge. Our job is to ask: "What does that mean? Why does that matter? And why is this particular person writing this story?" because these are the questions readers will ask.

## **Republishing model**

Unlike most media sites, all of our content is published under Creative Commons. That means that anyone – from bloggers to major media outlets – is welcome to republish our stories for free, and of course so are you and the institution to which you belong. Through republication, The Conversation and reaches a monthly audience of 35 million.

## **Republishing guidelines**

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### **Steal our articles (no, really)**

Rather than charge you for our content, we believe in a free flow of information. So unless otherwise noted, you can republish our articles online or in print for free. You just have to credit us and link to us, and you can't edit our material or sell it separately.

Using the "republish" button that accompanies every article is the easiest way to meet our guidelines, which are as follows.

Read more here: <https://theconversation.com/ca/republishing-guidelines>

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## How to register as an author

Register as a potential new author at: [theconversation.com/become-an-author](https://theconversation.com/become-an-author)

### Complete three short steps and you'll be set to write.

#### 1. Verify Institution

Please identify your current institution.

#### 2. Education History

Tell us a bit about your formal qualifications.

#### 3. Account Password

Set your password, agree the terms and write!

#### Your Institution

You must be a member of an academic or research institution to write for The Conversation.

#### Personal University/Institution Email

Your email address at the university or research centre where you work. We use this to verify your affiliation with that institution. Once your affiliation has been verified you are welcome to change your email to another address.

Institution Name (will be set automatically)

## How to pitch like a pro

Do not write your article before you pitch. Go to [theconversation.com/pitches/new](https://theconversation.com/pitches/new) Or scroll down on the front page of the site until you see this on the righthand side of the page, and click on **Tell us**.

Then tell us briefly about what you want to write. What will your article be about and what are the main points you would like to make? Ideally include details to show **why this story matters** – and **why now?**

### The pitch: What's your story?

Story \*

In one sentence, what's your story? (50 word limit)

Significance \*

Why is it interesting or significant for non-academic readers? (100 word limit)

Other key points

Any other key points to mention? (150 word limit)

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It's a good idea to work with your university or institute's communications staff to get your pitch right. You can also hone your pitch by talking to someone else outside your field of expertise. What questions do they ask? If they were to ask you bluntly, "**Why should people care?**" – what would you say? That's the first question readers will ask in deciding whether to spend the time reading your article.

If you can answer that "why should we care?" question well, it will greatly improve your chances of your pitch being accepted, and then seeing more people read and share your article, helping your work reach a bigger national and global audience.

Once you're happy with your pitch, fill in your details on the online pitch page, pick the section you think it might be best directed to (don't worry if you guess wrong, the editors will pass it onto colleagues if need be), write in your pitch, then hit "Pitch idea."

You'll get an automated reply saying when to expect a reply, and what to do if you don't hear back from an editor quickly. Editors at The Conversation can see many pitches a day and are juggling a number of different articles at the same time. So we can't say yes to every pitch. However, we still aim to reply within a few days, at least to say it's been received and if there are other stories already under way on that topic. Even if we can't say yes to your article, once we know about you and your expertise, there's a far greater chance of publishing your work in the future.

Most Conversation articles are only **800-1,000 words**, so starting with a clear idea of the most important point(s) you want to cover will save you time, and help us give you a quick, clear response to your pitch.

## **Agreeing on a brief & deadline**

If your pitch is accepted, the editor will discuss with you by email or by phone the structure and approach the article should take. Once these are agreed upon, the editor will **send you a brief**. This will include a link to your **author dashboard**, where you can write your story directly into our system.

It's important to get this brief right before you start writing, to save everyone time. If the article that is submitted is different from what was agreed upon, it may mean your editor will ask you to revise the piece substantially. You'll also agree on a first draft deadline; if you're not sure you can meet it, please say so.

## **Writing tips**

Work hard on the first paragraph to grab the reader's interest. Start with a short, sharp statement of the article's essential facts, in no more than two sentences. Start with what's new, relevant, or surprising. Readers want to know Five Ws: who, what, where, when, why, and sometimes how. The first few paragraphs of the article should make your main point and/or address what questions you're exploring in the piece and why it's important.

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Make a brief sketch of your main points and stick to them. Put the most important information first. That allows readers to explore a topic to the depth that their curiosity takes them (not everyone reads to the end).

## Tone

Write how people talk. A man should never “disembark from a vehicle” when he can “get out of a car.” Explain complex ideas. Don’t get too technical. Avoid jargon. If you write in our system, you can take advantage of our “Readability index.”

## Readability

You are currently writing for high school students. This allows you to reach a wider audience.

Word count:	1,334
Average words per sentence:	18.53
Syllables per word:	1.58
Character count:	8,137



### How can I improve the readability of my article?

- Sentences with 17 words or less are easier to understand.
- Keep paragraphs to a maximum of three sentences.
- Eliminate acronyms.
- Avoid jargon.
- Avoid stringing together multiple prepositions.
- Don’t verb nouns.

Our readability rating is based on Flesch-Kincaid readability tests, set at the level of **an educated 16-year-old**. That’s still higher than many news media outlets (many newspapers still aim for a 12-year-old level of literacy). We do that because we want to share your expert knowledge with everyone – including young people and people whose first language is not English.

## Referencing

If you make contentious statements, please back them up with research. The same goes for facts and figures. We provide references with online links that readers can click on, preferably to full research papers, but to abstracts or news stories if the full paper isn’t

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available. We'll help you add those in. But we can't use footnotes or endnotes. Ideally, please put your reference/web link in brackets beside each statement to be referenced.

## How to end

The last sentence should aim to summarize or reiterate the point made in your opening paragraph. Or you can just raise the question of what should happen next. Check to be sure you've stayed within the word count that was agreed upon.

## Headline tips

You can leave it to your editor to write a headline, but if you want to do a first draft, the following tips can help:

- Keep your headline simple and direct – it should be seven to 10 words at most, with the most relevant and important words at the start.
- Avoid puns and “smart” headlines, unless it suits the story. Instead, aim for an accurate and engaging label that neatly summarizes the content.
- Names of people, things and places are good. Don't abbreviate these.
- Aim to employ active verbs, which lend muscle and emphasize the “actor” in the story, e.g., “Aspirin cuts cancer risk” or “WikiLeaks reveals flaws in government legislation.”
- Think of ways to distinguish your article from others. Is this a breakthrough? Does it answer an important question or solve a puzzle?
- Would you read it? Remember, you are writing for an online readership. Ask yourself what keywords you would use in a search to find your story. Assuming you find it, would you then feel compelled to read beyond the headline? If not, try again.

## Multimedia: Photos, graphs, videos & more

**Photos, videos, tables and graphs** can bring a story to life – so if you have any of those, it's worth mentioning that in your pitch and in discussions with your editor if the pitch is accepted. If you have data that can be presented in an Excel spreadsheet, we can make an interactive and embeddable chart or graphic.

## What's next after you submit for editing?

When you're done, hit the “Submit” button to send an email alert to your editor.

## Disclosure

As soon as possible, fill in your disclosure on the righthand side of your article page. We can't publish your article without it. If you have any questions about it, ask your editor.

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## Disclosure

This will appear alongside your article

 We ask authors to disclose any funding or affiliation that is relevant, or could be perceived to be relevant, to the subject about which they are writing. This transparency is designed to protect the author's reputation and that of The Conversation. Authors who fail to disclose relevant information may be banned from contributing in future.

Do you work for, consult with or own shares in any company or organisation that would benefit from this article?

Yes  No

Do you receive, or have you previously received, any relevant external funding, including government-funded, foundation or research council grants?

Yes  No

Do you have any other relevant affiliations that should be disclosed? This includes currently being a member of or volunteer for a political party, industry association, not-for-profit group, think tank or other politically active bodies.

Yes  No

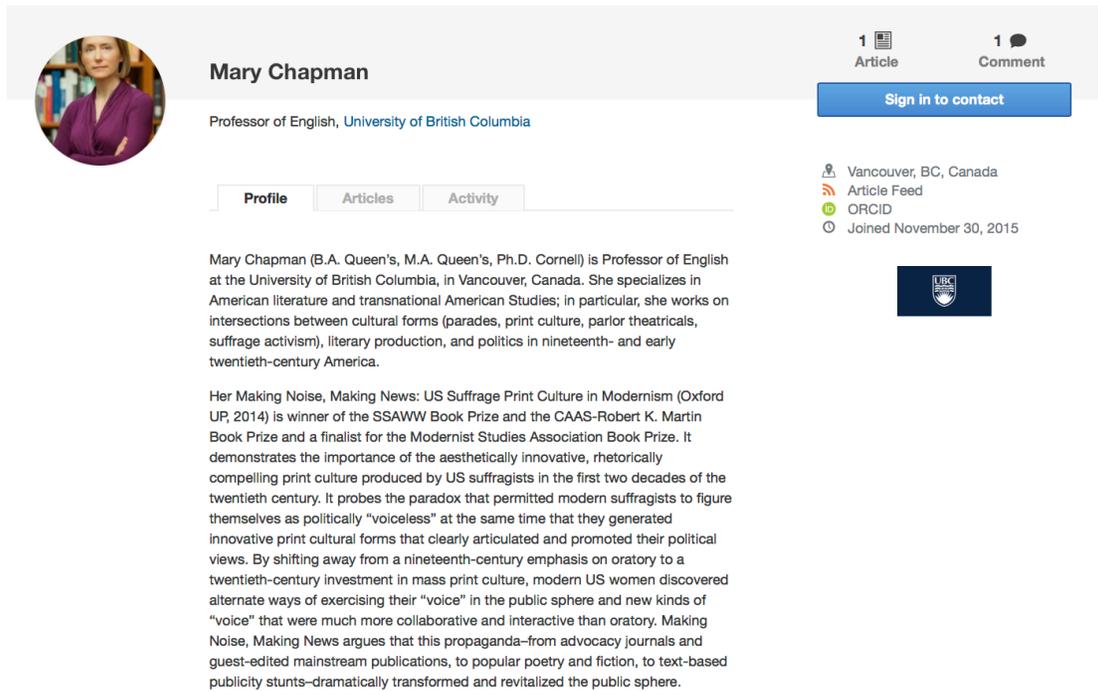
If you have any questions about what you should disclose, please contact your editor.

## Your author profile

Make sure you have a complete author profile: it's a free, high-profile place to be found by media and academic colleagues looking for experts in your field.

Most **Conversation author profiles show up first in Google searches**, typically above your official university/research organization profile, LinkedIn or other profiles. What do you want the rest of the world to know about you?

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The screenshot shows a user profile for Mary Chapman. On the left is a circular profile picture of a woman with short brown hair wearing a purple top. To the right of the picture, the name "Mary Chapman" is displayed in bold, followed by her title "Professor of English, University of British Columbia". Below this is a navigation bar with three tabs: "Profile" (selected), "Articles", and "Activity". The main content area contains a biographical paragraph and a longer paragraph about her book "Making Noise, Making News: US Suffrage Print Culture in Modernism". On the right side of the profile, there are statistics: "1 Article" and "1 Comment", a "Sign in to contact" button, and a list of location and activity information: "Vancouver, BC, Canada", "Article Feed", "ORCID", and "Joined November 30, 2015". At the bottom right of the profile area is a small UBC logo.

Don't be shy; it's in your interests to have a good, current profile. Current contact information including **a mobile phone** (shown only to editors; you can tick a box if you want your email and work phone number to be public) is a huge help. **Outdated contact details, or providing only your email address, could delay publication.**

## Final approval – from us and from you

Once your editor is finished revising the article, he or she will send it back to you for approval. Respond to any questions or suggestions the editor has. Review the text, photos, captions and headline to make sure they're all accurate. To see how the article will look when published, click "Preview" at the top of the page.



If you make further changes, let your editor know you've done so. We're happy to keep reviewing the article until you and the editor are both happy with the content. When you are ready, hit "Approve" in the top right corner of the editing page. **We can't publish until you have approved the story and completed your disclosure.**

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## Publishing

Talk to your editor about when your article will be published. Some articles go online quickly; others may not be published for a while.

### **We always respect embargoes.**

When your article is published, please share it with your contacts. If you keep your university/research organization's communications team informed ahead of publication, they'll also be able to share your work through social media and other channels.

## Comments

Please keep an eye on comments to see if there are any important questions you want to answer, or discussions you'd like to be involved in. We actively moderate our comments, in accordance with our **Community Standards**, which we take seriously, including enforcing a real name policy for readers. But if you see any comments that concern you, you can hit the "Report" button at the end of the comment, which will alert our site moderator and your editor.

We've shared some tips on engaging with comments on every author's dashboard, which include:

### [How to engage with comments](#)

Participating in the comment section of your article allows you to further share your expertise and deepen conversation with readers. We are "The Conversation" and the comments section part of that discussion.

We've noticed that the quality of comments dramatically improves when the author participates in comments. Where possible, we encourage all authors to engage in comments on their own articles, as well as others.

Some authors will naturally be comfortable with debate and dissent; others will find it daunting. Here's an overview of what to expect and some tips to help you decide how and when to comment.

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## Community standards

All comments must follow our [community standards](#). We reserve the right to remove any comments that violate these standards. This includes any abuse towards authors, which will not be tolerated.

Familiarize yourself with these standards and ensure your own comments adhere to them. And if you read comments that breach these standards, please click the “report” button next to the comment.

We operate a post-moderation policy, which means comments are moderated after they’re posted. We also don’t moderate the site 24/7. That means there may be delays between a post being made, reported and removed and so you may come across comments that breach our standards – please “report” such posts.

## The community

Overall our community is well behaved and the majority of conversations are intelligent and respectful.

However, like other online communities, we do have problems with individual troublemakers and topics (e.g. climate, vaccination, religion, asylum seekers) that are notorious for “trolls” (people who deliberately provoke others for the reaction).

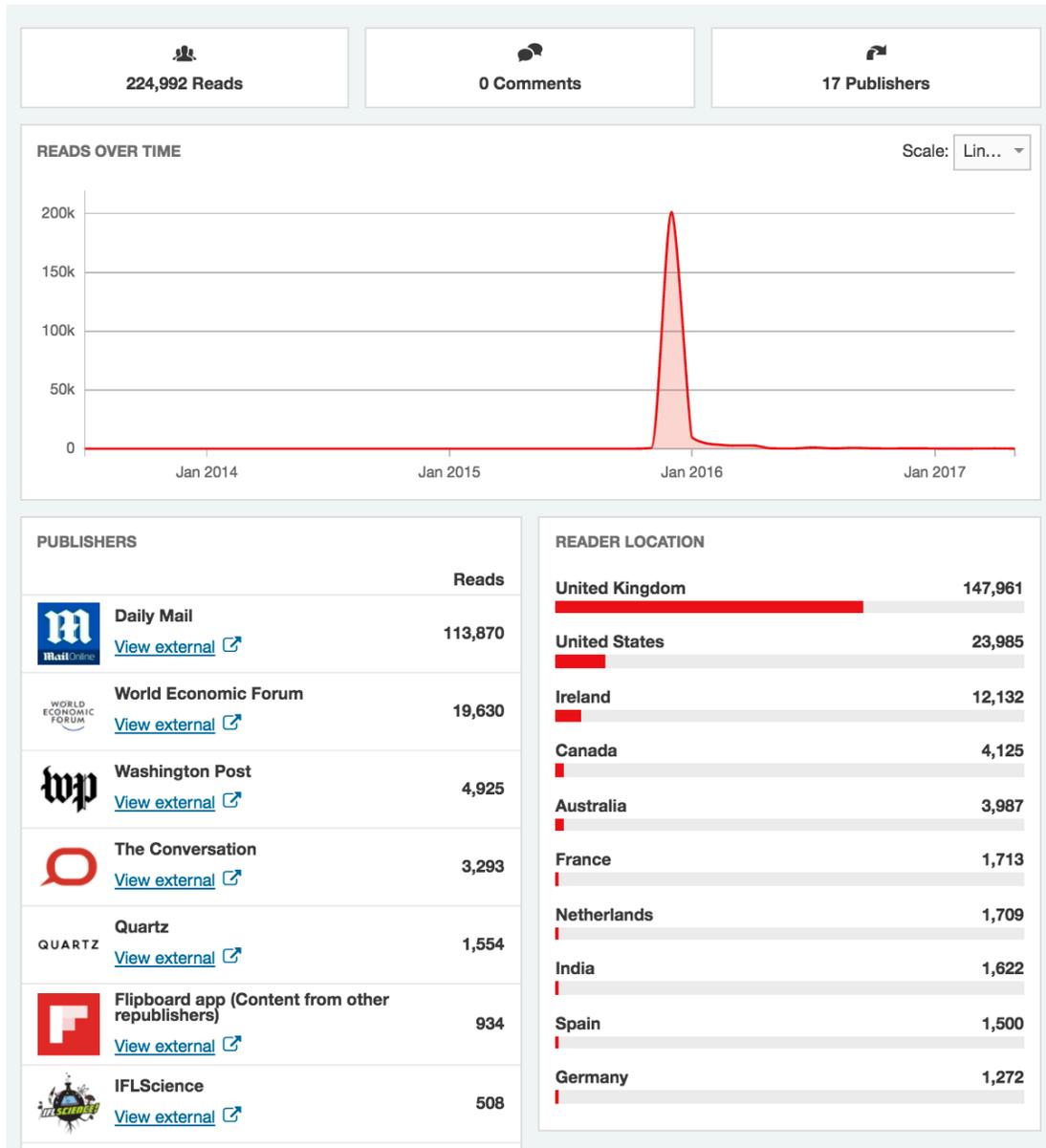
## Tips to participate in your comment stream

- Get in early. Commenting early can set the tone and help keep the discussion constructive and on-topic.
- Reply to reader questions: brief answers, making reference to the arguments made in the article, or providing links to further research are all helpful contributions.
- Posing questions for our community can be a way to direct discussion, be it just after the article has been posted or in replies to comments.
- Individual troublemakers: report and ignore. “Don’t feed the trolls” in combination with answering valid reader questions and comments is an effective way to keep the discussion on track and useful to all.
- Difficult areas or off-topic posts. You can try to get involved and steer things back on track – explain the facts, or just gently tell people they’re getting off topic. Your judgement will tell you when it stops being useful to engage with someone.
- If you feel the off-topic posts aren’t anywhere near the article topic, report them.
- Abusive comments: report so we can delete.

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## Measuring your readership

On your author dashboard, you can see how many people are reading your article, where in the world it has been read, the latest tweets and comments on it, and where your article has been republished. Our metrics are used at a number of universities in their Key Performance Indicators, measuring public engagement. Ask if your institution is using them too, so that you can get more credit for your contribution.



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## **Public and academic impact**

You may get calls from other media to do follow-up articles or interviews, which can greatly help increase the reach and public impact of your work. Talking to your university/research institute's communications staff will help you get good advice on that, especially if you haven't been interviewed much before.

Whether it's talking to journalists or to the general public, you can apply many of the tips in this guide. Don't forget to clearly answer "So what? Why should people care about this?" even before you're asked. That way, there's a good chance you'll win people's attention and keep them listening.

Many of our authors have been approached not only by news media, but also by respected journals, prospective students, book publishers, new academic collaborators, governments for policy advice and even new research funders.

We hope to see you join The Conversation.