

Title: A Journalist's Perspective on Science Media

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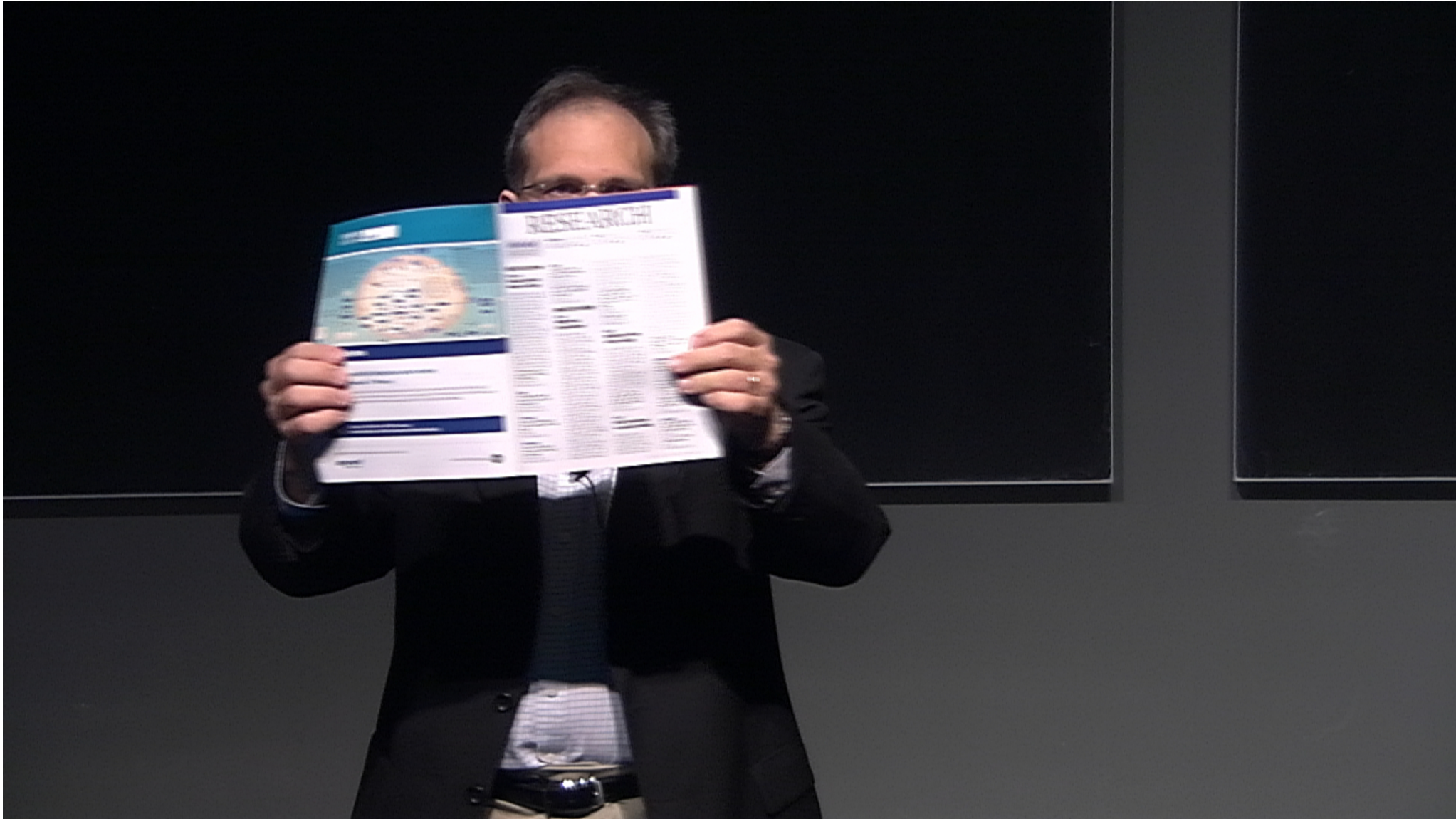
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Abstract: TBA

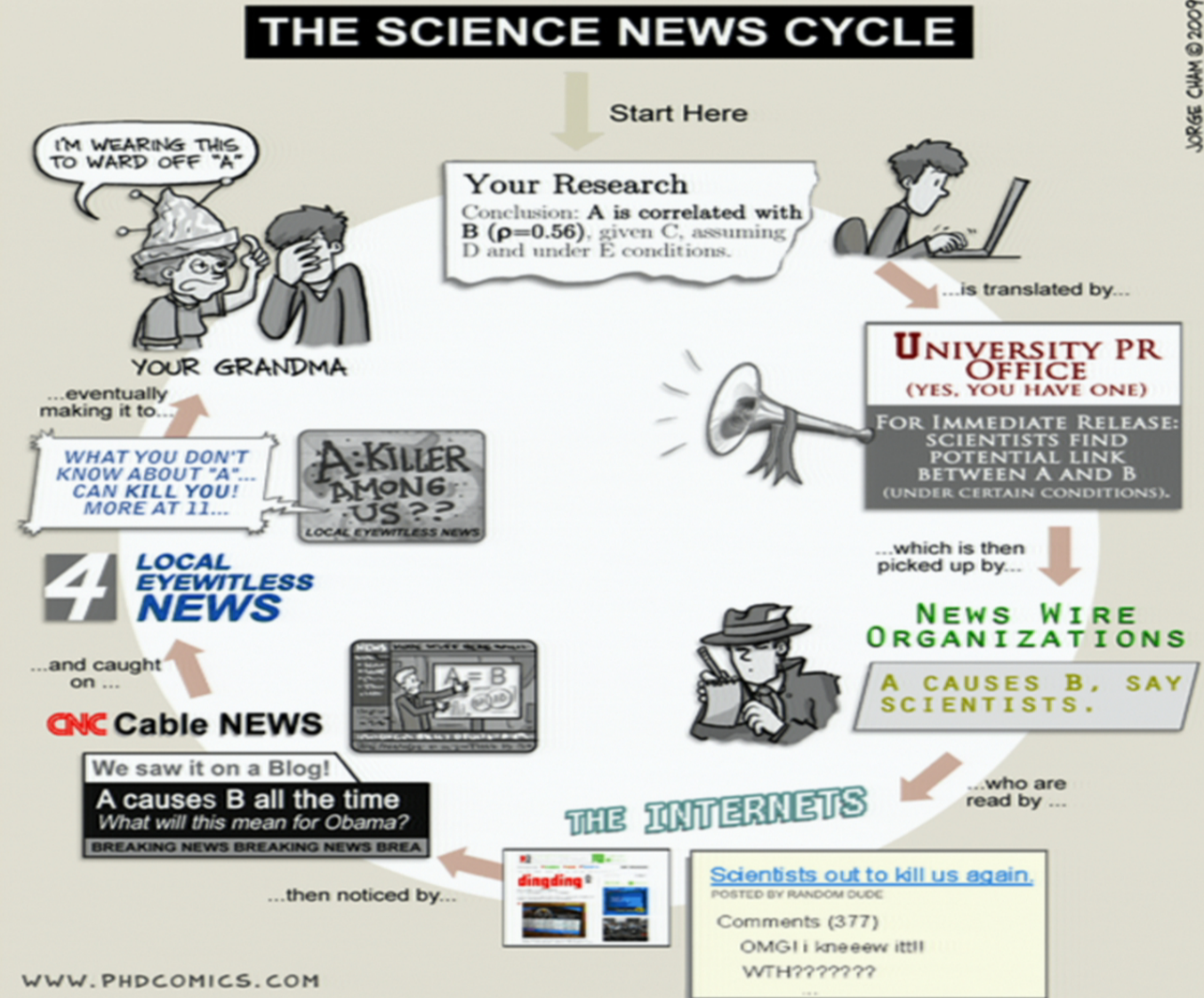
**BREAKTHROUGH
VS.
B*****T**

**Reporting on Science
in a Changing Media Landscape**

Ivan Semeniuk
Chief of Correspondents
nature



Science & Media: When Worlds Collide...



The Young Scientist...



Input →



→ Output

You Know You're a Science Reporter When:



Input →



→ Output

Editorial Independence



Sources →

→ Stories

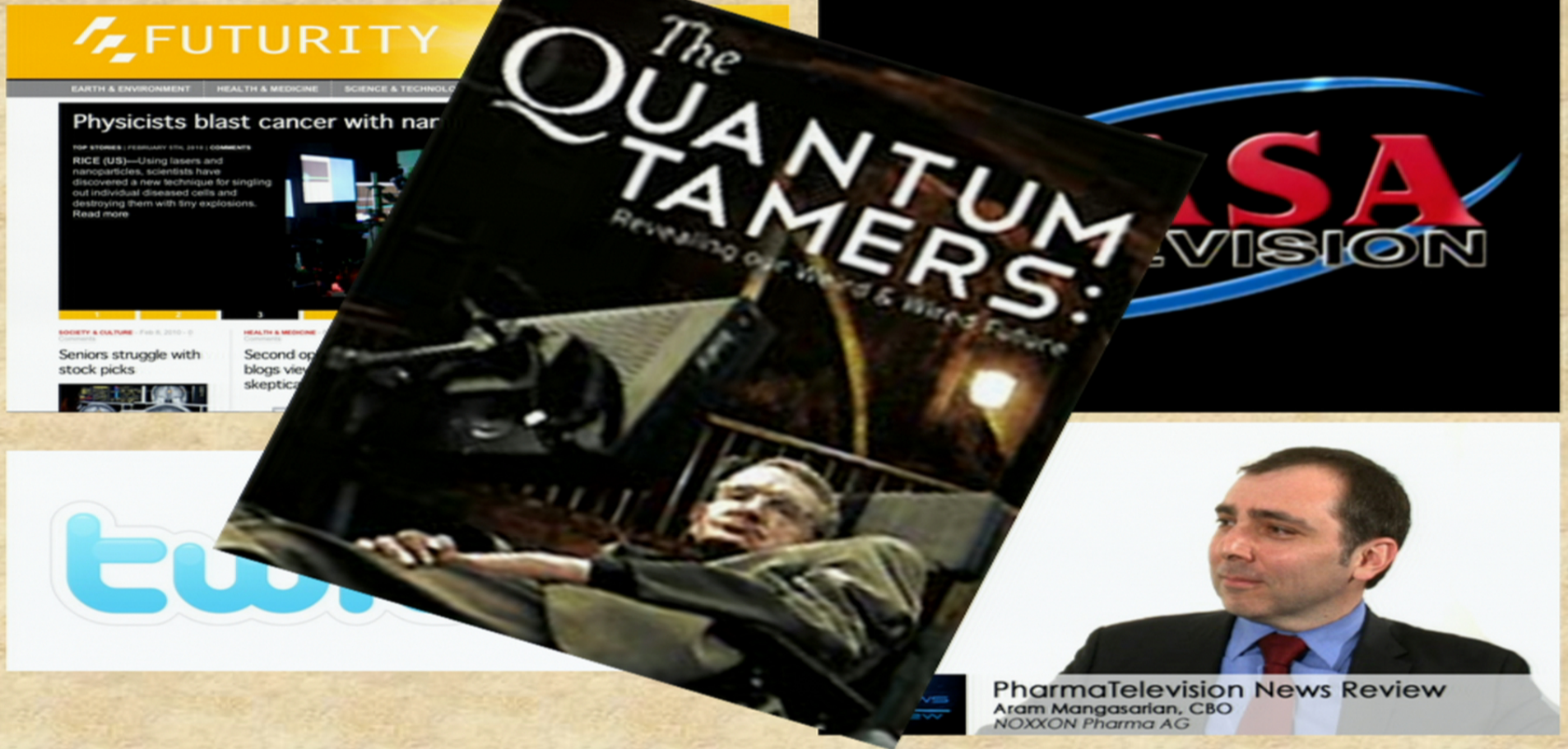
What's the alternative?



What's the alternative?



What's the alternative?



Grant review opens up Texas-sized rift

Big money and big ambitions roil state's research efforts.

Romanian prime minister accused of plagiarism

Allegations prompt questions about government's ability to tackle misconduct in academia.

Governments achieve early agreement at Rio summit

Environmentalists decry proposed text, citing lack of ambition, inspiration and commitment.

A brief history of science journalism:

- early 1900's – major US newspapers begin regular coverage of science as “progressive”
- 1934 – Nat. Assoc. of Science Writers formed to improve coverage/profile of science in society
- 1945 – NYT science writer William Laurence covers Manhattan project while also writing press releases for the war department (this was not considered a conflict of interest!)
- 1949 – “what counts most is recognition from scientists themselves” – George Gray, *Time* magazine science correspondent upon winning award from AAAS

A brief history of science journalism:

- 1957 – launch of *Sputnik 1* leads to massive infusion of resources in science and education in the US and across the west generally
- 1962 – Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* takes the shine off scientific progress – science journalists offer conflicted reactions
- 1969 – 1st manned moon landing broadcast to the world on live television
- 1974 – NYT science section and NOVA begin
- 1975 – CIA experiments on psychiatric patients in US and Canada become public
- 1979 – accident at Three Mile Island nuclear plant
- 1981 – Science writing program at UCSC begins
- 1986 – *Challenger* space shuttle disaster
- 1994 – the World Wide Web begins to alter media landscape
- 2006 – Bush administration accused of suppressing climate science
- 2006 – Knight Science Journalism tracker launched

Science & Journalism Compared

- Creativity & Stimulation
- Resource Challenged
- Salary Challenged
- Travel
- Casual Attire

Science & Journalism Contrasted

- Constraints (nature vs. human nature)
- Inputs (datasets, operators vs. actors, actions)
- Valued Outcome (general case vs. fresh angle)

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>>>> Emotion Drives Narrative

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“The fundamental principles of construction that underlie such stories as Poe’s *Murders in the Rue Morgue*, or Conan Doyle’s *Sherlock Holmes* series, are precisely those that should guide a scientific writer.”

- H.G. Wells , 1894



“Pure Science. Sheer Drama”

BBC Horizon

Generalist vs. Specialist

How scientists respond to new information:

Generalist vs. Specialist

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Generalist vs. Specialist

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Audiences & Outlets:

Professionally Interested

Audiences & Outlets:

Professionally Interested



Casually Interested

Audiences & Outlets:

Professionally Interested



Casually Interested



Audiences & Outlets:

Professionally Interested



Casually Interested



Casually Disinterested

Audiences & Outlets:

Professionally Interested



Casually Interested



Casually Disinterested





$\text{News} = \{\text{Significant}\} \cup \{\text{Interesting}\}$



News –

interesting}

A Fact of Life:

Most science stories in the general media (especially non-medical stories) fall squarely in the “interesting” category and not the “significant” category.

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... but that's not all.



A news editor's checklist:



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Peg - Why this now?

Interesting – What makes it irresistible?

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Editorial
Independence



Sources →

→ Stories



Mainstream media:
Broken business model

Noteworthy Developments:



Now let me ask you a few questions...



Now let me ask you a few questions...





Your External Relations Team

- Perimeter's External Relations team is here to support your media engagement



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Engaging with Media

1. Understand the request
2. Deal with deadlines
3. Obtain an ability to fact check
4. Ensure clarity over 'on or off' the record comments
5. Be prepared
6. Be yourself
7. Know your limits
8. Provide supporting info
9. Seek a correction if needed (upon publication)
10. Thank the reporter



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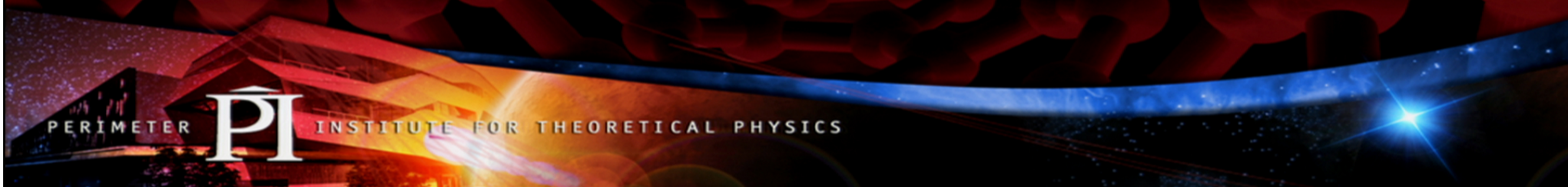
- What is the publication?
- Who is the audience?
- Where is the audience?
- What is the focus of the story?
- What are likely questions?
- Who else will be interviewed?
- When is the publication date?

Remember: you can decline the request

Engaging with Media

2. Dealing with deadlines

- Media is on its own clock
 - Not your clock. Will require commitment.
- If timing is too tight, say “no”
 - No comment is better than a quote or full article you come to regret.



Engaging with Media

3. Obtain an ability to fact check

- Ensures you will be contacted after the story is drafted, but before publication, to confirm information you provided
- Does not mean you will see the full story, but you will gain insights on how your information and quotes will be used
- Ask for this prior to granting interview

Engaging with Media

4. Ensure what is 'on or off' the record

- Know the scope of the interview
- If in doubt, ask
- Clearly say this is “off the record”
 - *Does not mean your info won't be used*
 - *The reporter may seek another source*
 - *You have provided a “tip”*



Engaging with Media

5. Be prepared

- Review past stories by the reporter
 - External Relations team can find these for you
- Review your content
- Talk to others

Engaging with Media

6. Be yourself

- Be who you are
- Be relaxed
- Be an ambassador:
 - for science
 - for physics
 - for Perimeter
 - for your colleagues

Engaging with Media

7. Know your Limits

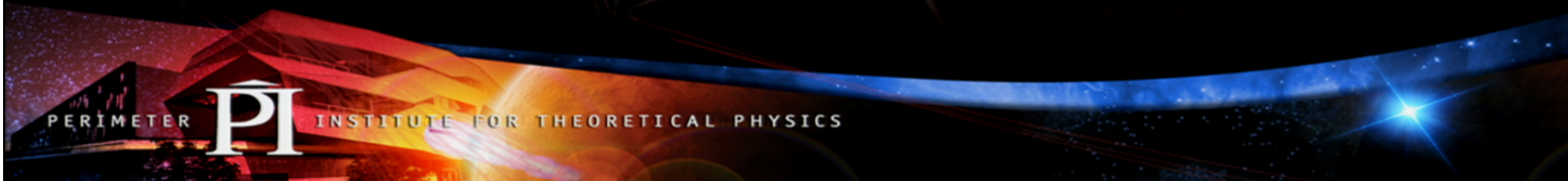
- If asked something outside your comfort zone, defer to others



Engaging with Media

8. Provide supporting info as needed

- Links to related info
- Other contacts
- Photos, diagrams, materials



Engaging with Media

9. Seeking a Correction

- Be quick
- Be specific
- Google Alert (name, topic, reporter)
- Contact reporter or editor immediately
- Aim to update the online version ASAP

Engaging with Media

10. Thank the Reporter

- He/She worked hard to champion your story
- He/She respected you
- Building a relationship
 - Small community
 - You are becoming a “source” among reporters
 - Likely to meet again

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