



## Guide for Press Conference Speakers



Press conference at the EGU 2015 General Assembly (Credit: EGU/Stephanie McClellan)

“*Nature* persists in the belief that researchers who take action by engaging with people beyond their peers in support of the evidence can make a positive difference.”

– in *Nature* journal editorial, January 2017

Sharing geoscientific information beyond the scientific community helps not only to raise awareness of the Earth, planetary and space sciences, but also to engage the general public and policy-makers with research issues that have (or may have) an impact on people’s lives. Press conferences are a means of achieving these goals. They give scientists the opportunity to directly communicate with journalists who, in turn, produce science stories that reach a wider audience. As a press conference speaker, you play an important role in ensuring these stories are both informative and accurate. This guide, which also provides practical details about EGU General Assembly press conferences, is intended to help you in this regard.

**Please wait until your press conference to speak to reporters.** If a journalist reports your new scientific findings in advance, they will be considered old by other reporters who, therefore, will be less likely to attend your press conference. The most successful press conferences, which result in wider press coverage, are those presenting fresh results that all journalists can cover in each of their respective media outlets at the same time.

## Practical information: EGU General Assembly press conferences

### Where?

Press conferences take place in the Press Centre located on the [Yellow Level 0 \(ground floor\)](#) of the Austria Center Vienna. If, for some reason, your press conference is happening in a different room, the EGU Media and Communications Manager will inform you in advance.

### When?

Please be at the Press Centre some 10 minutes before the start of your media briefing. If possible, also make sure you are available for at least 10 minutes (preferably more) after your press conference in case journalists want to ask extra questions or arrange an interview with you.

### How?

In the vast majority of EGU press conferences, panellists give short presentations, of around 5 minutes, introducing themselves and providing the main points and conclusions of their work (format A – [example](#)). Unless told otherwise, assume your media briefing will be in this format.

A few press conferences are held in a question-and-answer format (format B – [example](#)). In this case, typically a moderator makes an opening statement of a few minutes introducing the topic of the media briefing. Then, each panellist briefly introduces herself/himself, indicating her/his area of expertise. Format B press conferences generally provide more time for interaction between the experts and the media, and are more suitable when there is a timely issue worth discussing, rather than new research results to present.

Following the presentations, the EGU media and communications manager will open the floor to questions from reporters only (press officers and scientists can only query the panel if there is time left after journalists asked their questions). After 50 minutes from the beginning of the conference, or when the questions stop, the press conference ends.

### Audience

Based on previous years, anywhere between 2 and 25 people may attend your media briefing. It is up to each journalist to decide whether or not they want to go to a particular press conference, so we cannot give you a precise number of attendees. In any case, the EGU holds a full-scale press conference even if only one reporter is in the room. Press conferences are also web streamed live so that reporters not in Vienna can still listen to you and ask questions remotely.

### On the record

Remember that the entire press conference (presentations, questions, interviews) is 'on the record'. Don't say anything you wouldn't want to see reported or, worse, quoted and attributed to you!

### Technical details

The Press Centre is equipped to show computer presentations in PowerPoint or similar software. There is a Windows laptop available to show your slides, videos or images so please bring your presentation material on a USB drive. Please try to have your presentation in PDF format to avoid compatibility issues when viewing it on the Press Centre laptop. Alternatively, you can bring your own laptop. Please let me know well in advance if you need any equipment not listed here for your presentation.

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## How to get your message across: The opening presentation

In your (format A) opening presentation – remember, you have only around 5 minutes to speak – it is **very important** that you:

- State the conclusions and main points first; explanations and background follow (this is not an academic talk – rather, imagine you are explaining in only a few minutes why your research is new and relevant to a family member who has never done research but is interested in science).
- Begin with the main points, even if your talk is in the nature of a review.
- Stress at the beginning why your new discovery is particularly important and what are its implications; explain why you are excited about the work.
- Remember that journalists are interested in knowing what's new and why your work is significant and exciting; literature reviews and descriptions of the methods you used are much less relevant to them.
- Make sure your language is clear: avoid acronyms and technical terms (if you need to use them, explain what they mean), use analogies to clarify difficult concepts.
- Be aware that the graphics and other visuals you are using in your scientific talk may not be suitable for your press conference: simple, colourful and appealing pictures are preferable to complicated graphics.
- Try to have no more than five slides, but make sure they aren't cluttered; another option is having no slides at all.

We recommend you work together with your institution's press office to produce suitable hand-outs, including a press release, to distribute to journalists. The EGU media and communications manager will then liaise with your press officer directly to make sure the press material relating to your press conference reaches the attending journalists. If your university or organisation doesn't have a press office, please send your slides and other presentation material to the EGU media and communications manager in advance so she can upload them to the General Assembly media website and print copies for attending journalists. If reporters have your presentation, they can listen to what you say rather than having to copy the content of your slides.

In press conferences with format B, the panel should introduce the topic to attendees, explaining related issues and challenges of relevance to the general public. In individual introductions, each panellist should explain why they are there and what their area of expertise and views on the topic are.

## Clarify your points: The question period

After the opening statements, reporters have the opportunity to ask questions to clarify points you have made or to gather further information about your work.

The advice given by the former American Geophysical Union Public Information Manager, Peter Weiss, in his [message to participants in AGU Fall Meeting press conferences](#) on how to handle the question period is particularly relevant:

“Some [reporters] may have Ph.D.'s in science; others may have simply covered science for many years. Some reporters may not be science writers at all, but have been assigned to

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cover your press conference as part of their general assignment duties. Those in the first group might ask a highly technical question, but your answer should be intelligible to all. Take a moment to clarify the question, if it is really obscure.

Questions are rarely hostile, but reporters will unerringly spot a waffling answer and doggedly seek further details. It is perfectly acceptable to decline to answer a question, but you will arouse interest if you don't say why: e.g., "This is out of my area of expertise"; "We are still awaiting those results, and I don't want to speculate" (rather than, "No comment!")."

Further, it is useful for speakers to try to anticipate questions, and write down notes for possible answers. Even if you didn't get to use analogies to explain difficult concepts during your presentation, they might come in handy during the question period.

If you feel someone else in the room (not a panellist) is more suited to answer a particular question, you are welcome to ask for their assistance. Please identify the person by name and affiliation, and explain briefly why she or he is better suited to clarify the matter to reporters.

## After the press conference: Interview time

After the questions stop, some journalists may come up to you for further information or seeking a good quote for their stories. They may also ask you for an interview. Please inform the people at the EGU Press Centre Info Desk in the latter case as there are quiet rooms available for one-on-one interviews at the General Assembly venue.

To prepare for the interview, you may find it useful to read EGU's short guide on [Tips for Communicating with the Media](#). This type of preparation is handy every time a reporter asks to interview you, not only at the General Assembly.

You may also find the following resources useful:

- [Interview section of EGU's Media Guide 2011](#), by Dick van der Wateren, former EGU press officer – tips for successful interviews (3 pages)
- AAAS [Media Interview Tips](#) (2 pages)
- AGU's [You and the Media](#) guide, by Herbert Funsten – comprehensive information about dealing successfully with the news media (39 pages)

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this year's EGU General Assembly press conferences. The EGU hopes you enjoy the experience!

Please get in touch with EGU Media and Communications Manager Bárbara Ferreira if you have any questions. You may reach Bárbara by e-mail at [media@egu.eu](mailto:media@egu.eu) or by phone: +49-89-2180-6703 before and after the meeting, or +43 6763 199 385/6 (Press Centre landline) at the General Assembly.

*By Bárbara Ferreira, EGU Media and Communications Manager \* Based on Herbert Funsten's You and the Media (2004) and Peter Weiss' Speakers Guide to Fall Meeting Press Conferences (2012). Last updated on 31/03/2017.*

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