

## **SPEAKING ACADEMIC AND JOURNALESE.**

### **What's the difference and why is it important?**



Academic writing is generally formal, complex and passive in style. Journalists write in a clear, concise and active style that doesn't waste words.

So how do academics switch from one to the other, and why is it important?

Let's hear it from a couple of journalists:

"The people I like to speak to most – and there's only a few of them – are people who know the subject really well but can also express it very, very clearly and concisely in a few words. There are not many people who can do that, but they're gold," says **John Ross, Asia-Pacific Editor, Times Higher Education.**

**Julie Hare, Higher Education Editor of the Australian Financial Review,** puts it more bluntly. "What cheeses me off the most is people who just talk in that awful bland, high umbrella kind of language that's meaningless and doesn't have anything that speaks to reality."

She adds: "I've spoken to scientists about some of the most obscure stuff in the universe and they can still explain it to you – that whole elevator pitch thing. Everything can be explained; you've just got to work out how to explain it."

So, if you want to get your research out there in media land, you may need to change your thinking and language.

First, make sure you actually have something newsworthy to say. Then clarify it.

**Professor Marian Baird of The University of Sydney Business School** says if she can explain to students the research process and outcomes, she should be able to do that to the general public.

Next, think about your audience. What do people want or need to know?

**Professor Nick Wailes of UNSW Business School** recalls writing a 700-word opinion piece many years ago at the request of a university media person.

"The media person just turned it around and said the final paragraph was actually what you should start with...and then the rest of it is unpacking and explaining it."

“What that made pretty clear to me was that writing a journal article and being effective in the media were two very different things,” he says.

Your points must be conveyed in plain English – and don’t add qualifications. As **Professor Ray Da Silva of UWA Business School** says: “There’s no need for you to add X, Y and Z. Get to the point; give them a soundbite.”

If you or your communications people are responding in writing to media questions, provide usable information promptly.

This may sound obvious, but journalist John Ross finds that written responses can take up to two days. Responses are often brief and may contain a lot of waffle words or dot points that don’t answer his questions.

“It’s obfuscation. Journalists become used to this sort of stuff and it just increases your suspicion levels and your scepticism,” Ross says.

For more tips, visit <https://abdc.edu.au/abdc-communications/tips-to-improve-communication/>