

# Engaging with the Media

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**DATA FOR  
HEALTH INITIATIVE**

# Goals and objectives

- Practice translating scientific information into plain language
- Establish procedures to engage with the media
- Learn and practice how to write articles, tweets, press releases, etc... for the public, the media, and social media

# Editorial staff expectations

- Understand how the media works (deadlines, pressures) and what type of news journalists want to print (type of information, types of stories, level of detail)
- Help the media understand how editors work
- Adapt articles, tweets, press releases, etc... that follows the format of journalistic writing (the 5 “Ws”)
  - Make stories engaging so that journalists will want to publish them
- Engage with the media on a regular basis

## **EDITORS BEWARE**

**Do not expect journalists to  
write the stories for you!**



# Competing interests?

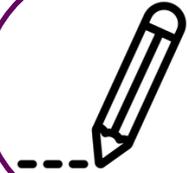
- You and reporter have same objective: put out story
- But whose story?

## Reporters seek



- Controversy, conflict
- Firsts, bests, new, exclusives
- Good quote, strong visual, compelling story
- Top-line information, avoiding the “weeds”
- Trends, getting ahead of curve
- Information that runs counter to conventional wisdom

## You seek



- Positioning as authoritative voice
- Engagement with audiences
- Accurate messages, without hype
- Strong, credible quotes
- Bolstering public confidence in your agency
- Relationship-building with reporters

# Why interact with the media?

- Disseminate accurate, current health information
- Translate complex scientific topic into plain language
- Help public understand important health information
- Aim to have public ACT on this information
- Publicize PHB's mission and the value of its information
- Help PHB be the voice of your organization

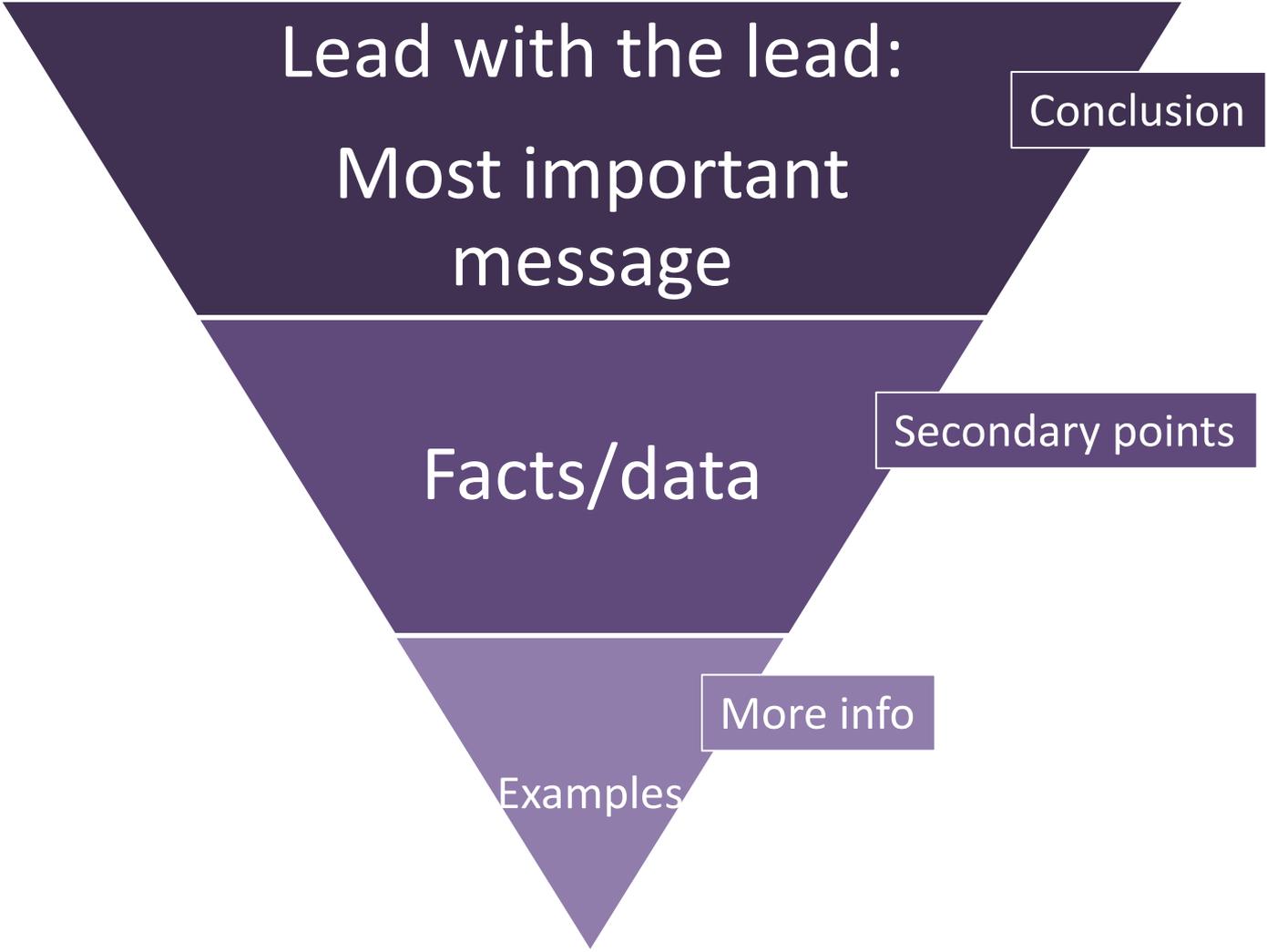
# What is your role?

DON'T...	INSTEAD...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Don't write the press release or media post from scratch</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Send the SOCO form to author to fill out</li><li>▪ Use it to write the press release or post</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Don't write a press release or media post for every article</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Choose 1-2 relevant interesting pieces per issue</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Don't try to write too much or too many</li><li>▪ Don't focus on quantity</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Write a few short pieces</li><li>▪ Focus on quality, not quantity</li></ul>

# The press as your audience

- Characteristics:
  - Usually have progressive “mainstream” values and beliefs
  - Concerned about individual freedom issues
  - May be intimidated by scientists or health professionals
  - Specific news media (e.g., newspapers, TV) may have different interests
- What they are interested in:
  - Topics of interest to the public
  - Stories that are more “newsworthy” (e.g., local tie-in)
  - Personal stories (narratives)
- What constraints they have:
  - Short deadlines
  - Tight news space
  - May not specialize in science

# Reporters use the inverted pyramid



# How reporters write



# Your turn: find the “Ws”



## To Calm Nervous Families, Pakistan Changes Polio Vaccination Tactics

*Paralysis cases spiked after a vaccination drive was derailed by false rumors that dozens of children had collapsed and died.*

NYT, May 24, 2019

After serious setbacks in April led to a cluster of new polio cases, Pakistan is revamping its vaccination strategy in a renewed effort to wipe out the virus.

The country is one of just three — along with Afghanistan and perhaps Nigeria — in which polio is still endemic. Eradication of the virus in Pakistan is crucial to the drive to rid the world of polio, once and for all.

Now, vaccination teams will take a friendlier approach, ask fewer questions, make fewer follow-up visits, and stop recording extensive details about the families they visit, Pakistan’s polio eradication program announced.

# The “Ws”



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[After serious setbacks **WHAT**] in [April **WHEN**] led to a [cluster of new polio cases **WHAT**] [Pakistan **WHERE/WHO**] is [revamping its vaccination strategy **WHAT**] in a [renewed effort to wipe out the virus **WHY**].

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## **Deadly Falls in Older Americans Are Rising. Here’s How to Prevent Them.**

*The rate of deaths after falls is rising for people over 75, a new study shows. But falls are avoidable for most seniors. We have some tips.*

NYT, June 4, 2019

As the population ages, the number of older Americans who die following a fall is rising. A study published Tuesday in the medical journal JAMA found that for people over 75, the rate of mortality from falls more than doubled from 2000 to 2016.

Researchers analyzed information obtained from death certificates maintained by the federal government’s National Center for Health Statistics. In 2016, the rate of death from falls for people 75 and older was 111 per 100,000 people, they found. In 2000, that rate was 52 per 100,000 people.

Elizabeth Burns, a health scientist at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, who was an author of the study, said the reason for the increase was unclear.

“The most likely reason is that people are living longer with conditions that in the past they might have died from,” she said. In addition, she continued, older adults are on medications that increase their risk of falling. Women are slightly more likely to fall than men, but men are slightly more likely to die as a result of a fall.

# The “Ws”



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# Before releasing information to the media, consider...

- Ability — Do you have the right information?
- Competency — Are you qualified to discuss the topic?
- Authority — Who has jurisdiction over the issue?
- Accuracy — Have you verified the information?
- Propriety — Does it display sensitivity and dignity?
- Security— Is the information classified?
- Policy — Are you allowed to release?