

## EMBARGO SETTING TIPSHEET

### Why this matters

#### No embargo, no press

Hard to believe, but true – if your scientific paper gets published before you arrange for press coverage, relatively few people will learn about your findings. That’s because journalists need time to prepare a story and they want to be the first to announce it – that’s what makes it ‘news’. You will not get a second chance to get them interested once your paper is posted on line. Trust me, I’ve learned the hard way. I’ve had terrific, newsworthy papers ignored because they were published ‘ahead of print’. Once, this happened even before I returned the proofs to the journal. As a result, I’ve learned a few things which I will share with you below. Our Institute has published several manuscripts that were the top downloaded papers in their journals (over 30,000 downloads) with stellar Altmetric scores. The steps below take time, effort and some courage, but the rewards are worth it.

### Tips for successfully setting an embargo date

- **When to convey your press plans:** Let the journal know that you plan to do press outreach and would like to set an embargo date for the paper *as soon as you think a paper might be accepted*. This might be when you submit revisions, or even when you initially submit the manuscript (with a caveat of “If this were to be accepted...”) but definitely by the time you reply to your acceptance email. At this point you should also have engaged your press officer, if you have one, and should copy them on all relevant communications with the journal.
- **Who to tell:** You will likely communicate with an Editor, the publications staff, and possibly the Editor-in-Chief. *Tell everyone you communicate with at the journal* that you plan to do press outreach and would like to set an embargo date. Otherwise, your message can easily fall through the cracks. Many people at the journal are working to help get this paper published and you need to hit the right person at the right time to ensure your paper does not get posted online before your press outreach. Every journal has a different process, so in my experience, the best way is to tell everyone, and remind them frequently until you get confirmation of an embargo date.
- **What to do if things go wrong:** Until your embargo date is confirmed by the journal, check the journal page often to make sure your paper has not been published ahead of print. Believe it or not, this can happen without you being alerted. If you discover your paper online, *act quickly, and go straight to the top*. Contact the Editor-in-Chief, as well as the Editor in charge of your paper, and the publications staff - basically everyone you have communicated with so far. Ask them to take the paper offline until the embargo date. This may rescue your press opportunity if your paper is taken down quickly.

### A word on courage

#### Ignore the gremlins

Focusing on communications may be out of your comfort zone. It is not uncommon to hear gremlins whispering (or shouting) in your ear: “You’re annoying the journal editors while the fate of your article is in their hands!” or “Your findings are not that interesting, you will look silly insisting on press attention.” or “You probably won’t get any press anyway – why make all this fuss?” *Don’t listen to them!* Journals love press attention. Your findings are interesting and you probably spent many years (and many taxpayer dollars) arriving at your conclusions. Give people what they paid for! If you don’t get any press, no harm done, and you gained good experience. Next time, maybe you’ll hit the front page.