

Finding expert scientific sources

Science reporting quick tips from [SciLine](#) and [The Open Notebook](#)

Interviewing scientists actively conducting research on your topic can help you get the science right. Finding a scientist with exactly the right expertise for your story may require a little digging but will bring important context and detail to the final product.

Plan what types of sources you'll need for a story.

- **If you're reporting on a specific study**, interview at least one of the scientists who did the study and at least one source who wasn't directly involved but is familiar with the methods of the study or the field.
- **Avoid using quotes from press releases** about the study—these are often reviewed and approved by the sources themselves, and make for less genuine, lively material.
- **Don't just rely on people quoted** in other stories or who have a large social media presence. They might not be doing research on the specific question you have.
- **Look out for potential [conflicts of interest](#)**, such as a researcher's financial ties to a certain company. COIs aren't always dealbreakers, but they will inform what questions you ask, and you will likely need to reveal them in your story.
- **Remember your journalistic responsibility** to seek sources with diverse backgrounds and perspectives.

Find scientists actively conducting research on a topic by using scientific paper databases or expert lists.

- **Check out** [Google Scholar](#), [PubMed](#), and [ScienceDirect](#) to start. Most use standard Boolean operators and allow you to search by keywords and filter by year, so you can avoid outdated research. (Try limiting your search to the last five years.)
- **Scan the titles** and the summary paragraph (Abstract) for each result. For those that appear most relevant, reach out to one or more of the study authors.
- **Consider which of a paper's [multiple authors](#)** to contact. The first author is often a more junior scientist who can cover the details of the study. The last author is often a more senior researcher who can provide broader context. A "corresponding author" will have their email address listed.
- **To go further, look at particularly relevant citations** in the Introduction and Discussion sections of a relevant paper, and reach out to *those* authors.
- **Use [expert databases compiled by](#)** universities, societies, and special interest groups, some of which are organized by topic. Social media lists curated by scientists or other journalists may also turn up relevant sources.

Leverage networks.

- **During interviews, ask your sources** to recommend one or two other sources, particularly someone who might disagree with them or offer another perspective.
- **If you're covering a regional issue**, try reaching out directly to nearby universities' communications offices to see if they can connect you with someone local.

➤ Further reading: [sourcing stories](#) and [finding scientists](#).