

# Go-to questions for interviewing scientists

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

**Sometimes, you don't have a lot of time to prepare for an interview, or you might not know where to start with an unfamiliar topic. Use this list of questions as a template when planning your interviews.**

Here are questions you can ask of any scientist source, whether you're covering a research study, looking for background on a topic, or jumping on breaking news:

- What made you decide to study this topic?
- Why is this research important? (Why should people care?)
- Who does this research affect most?
- What should readers know about this topic?
- What's something people tend to misunderstand about this topic?
- What are the big unanswered questions in this field or about this issue?
- Is there any disagreement among scientists about this subject? What are the sides of that disagreement?
- Is there anything I didn't ask that you wanted to share?

If you're covering a study, here are key questions to ask at least one of the authors:

- What are the key findings from this work?
- How do these results support or refute others in the field?
- What are the big-picture implications of these findings?
- Can you walk me through how you did this study?
- What are the limitations of this study?
- Did anything about your findings surprise you?
- What are the next steps in this line of research?

But don't stop there! Ask at least one outside source (a scientist who was not involved in the research) to comment on the study:

- What do you think of the methods the researchers used?
- Do you agree with their conclusions?
- What are the strengths of this study? The weaknesses?
- How do these findings fit with the bigger picture of the field?

Here are some clarifying questions to ask if a scientist is using too much jargon, packing in too much detail, or if everything's going over your head:

- Can I stop you for a second and have you explain that again? (It's okay to interrupt!)
- Can you think of a specific example?
- Do you have an analogy you typically use to explain this?
- How would you explain this to a high school student?
- I think what you're saying is \_\_\_\_\_. Do I have that right?

➤ Further reading: [questions to ask when interviewing a scientist](#), [go-to interview questions for news stories](#), and [questions for profile interviews](#).