Responding to Misinformation in the Media

Utilize the guidelines and checklists below when responding to misinformation in the media.

Letter to the Editor

When to Use: Story is biased/unbalanced/misleading or contains extensive misinformation
Word Count: ~ 150 words
Content: Briefly discuss your view using 1-2 supporting points and consumer-friendly language
  • Include reference to article/column/editorial to which you are commenting
  • Include your contact information and professional affiliation
Timing: Quick response is critical – for daily newspapers, within a two-day period after article appears
Approach: Reader should be able to quickly understand your main point; messaging should be clear, easy to understand, educational and confident in tone
How: Most publications have a specific e-mail address or form on the publication website
  • Submissions are typically managed by a member of the Opinion section

Checklist
✓ Is your response 150 words or less?
✓ Does your response refer to the article/column/editorial to which you are commenting?
✓ Is your contact information included?
✓ Did you review the submission policy on the publication’s website to ensure you’re meeting all the requirements?
✓ Have you explained your key points using consumer friendly language?

Corrections

When to Use: Article contains a factual error that is easily corrected
Content: Provide the correct information with supporting materials
Timing: As soon as the error is identified
Approach: Positive, open tone but stress the importance of correcting the inaccuracy to avoid misleading readers
How: Call or e-mail the reporter directly who wrote the article with the mistake
  • If there’s no response, you can also contact the editor or web editor so the content can be immediately fixed online

Checklist
✓ Have you provided the correct information with any necessary supporting materials?
✓ Have you included rationale for correcting?
Web Comments

**When to Use:** Article contains inaccurate information that could mislead consumers

**Word Count:** ~ 100 words

**Content:** Briefly discuss your view of the topic in conversational tone; include your credentials; whenever possible, link to appropriate citation or additional information

**Timing:** Within one day of the story being posted online

**Approach:** Focus on the positives; avoid criticizing the author or other points-of-view

- If the opportunity arises, engage in conversations with other commenters who appear open to learning more

**How:** Post directly to the online story of concern; usually found at the end of the article

- May require you to create a login/username to post

**Checklist**

- Is the article recent?
- Is your response within 100 words?
- Have you highlighted your expertise for the reader (e.g. “As a dairy scientist...“)?
- Would someone outside the industry understand your response?
- Did you make your key point quickly and clearly?
- Is the article from a biased source, or are comments skewed strongly negative? (If so, you might reconsider posting a response)

Educational Outreach

**When to Use:** Influential publication and/or reporter who covers the subject matter frequently

**Content:** Outline your point-of-view with supporting messages and references that back up your statement

- Must include examples and simple explanations to help the reporter understand what it means and how it could be communicated to readers
- Think beyond the questions being asked; consider the positive messages you want to share and ensure they are incorporated into your responses

**Timing:** When misleading article comes out and/or you have new, related information to share

**Approach:** Positive and engaging

- Provide credentials to show expertise on the topic
- Offer to be a source of information should the reporter have questions in the future

**How:** Engage the reporter directly with a phone call, if possible, or an email

**Checklist**

- Have you provided additional resources, perhaps some of your own research?
- Is your outreach presented with simple explanations to help the reporter understand the information and how it could be communicated to readers?
- Have you positioned yourself as a friendly, helpful resource?
- Have you provided your credentials and contact information?
- Have you offered to be a reference should the reporter need a future source on the topic in question?
Op-Ed

When to Use: Story is an ongoing trend or hot topic in the media and you have an opposing point-of-view to share
Word Count: 500 - 750 words, at most
Content: Lead with the strongest argument and follow up with examples to support your claim
• Include a brief bio and contact information with submission
Timing: Within two days of heightened news/conversations on a critical topic
Approach: Be provocative, but not outrageous. Inform the reader with clear, direct, yet personable language
How: Typically managed by the Opinion Editor; submit via e-mail or review the publication website for submission information

Checklist
✓ Is the topic currently being hotly debated?
✓ Do you express a point-of-view different than the current conversations on the topic?
✓ Is your strongest argument highlighted in the first paragraph?
✓ Is your response within 750 words?
✓ Did you highlight your credentials and any relevant work you’ve done on the topic?
✓ Have you provided a brief bio at the end of the piece with your contact information?

Blog Response

When to Use: When you have an ongoing perspective on specific topic
Word Count: ~ 500 words
Content: Proactive communication to establish yourself as an expert in the dairy science community
Timing: ASAP during relevant media cycle
Approach: Informative and educational tone focused on your expert opinion
• Highlight your experiences and work on the topic
• Link to relevant and helpful information to source your claims
How: Contact your company or academic institution to learn about opportunities to post on existing blogs
• If creating your own, sign up and create an account on a blogging website; popular ones include blogger.com and wordpress.com

Checklist
✓ Do you have an ongoing perspective on a specific topic you share?
✓ Do you have new research you’re working on that can be discussed in an open forum?
✓ Have you contacted your employer to see if there are opportunities to post on existing blogs?
✓ Did you provide links to source your claims?
Twitter/Facebook

**When to Use:** A story is being shared online and readers are focused on misinformation

**Word Count:** 140 characters per tweet/ 50 - 100 words for Facebook

**Content:** Brief comment or point-of-view on an issue, ideally linking to additional information
  - Ensure tone is informal given the format

**Timing:** Immediate

**Approach:** Be proactive and informative, not argumentative

**How:** Monitor conversations by searching for hashtags or following influencers on Twitter and Facebook
  - Contact DMI for more guidance to set up a Twitter handle or Facebook page

**Checklist**
- Have you created a Twitter or Facebook account?
- Is your tweet 140 characters or less/ post 50 - 100 words?
- On Twitter, have you used a hashtag (e.g. #dairy)?
- Did you include links to additional information?
- Is your response information and not defensive?