

Tips for Media Interviews

BEFORE THE INTERVIEW...

- Know your purpose. Prepare two or three essential points that you want to get across during the interview.
- Support your points with facts or anecdotes from your experience.
- Prepare. Study your subject and ask your friends, family, and colleagues to conduct mock interviews as practice.
- Consider your interview as an expanded conversation, and speak as naturally as you would to a researcher or other user.

DURING THE INTERVIEW...

- Before you begin to speak, smile at the interviewer to establish rapport.
- Use vocal variety. Let your voice and your delivery reflect the full spectrum of emotions and points of emphasis.
- Use gestures that complement the expression of your ideas. Avoid distracting or meaningless movements.
- Maintain eye contact throughout the interview and keep an “open” and friendly face.
- Communicate enthusiasm for and involvement in your subject.

GETTING YOUR POINT ACROSS...

- Be assertive – in a pleasant way – so that the conversation centers on subjects that you want to address. One way to do this is to respond to a narrow question with a very broad answer that encompasses the facts or opinions that you want to get across.

- Listen carefully to the question. Pause before you answer to give yourself time to formulate a response. If you don't understand a question, ask that it be repeated.
- Use the inverse pyramid in structuring your responses. Start with a general statement that sums up your position or philosophy succinctly and accurately. Then narrow your response to the specifics of why you feel the way you do. This approach is particularly valuable for radio and TV. If a producer decides to cut your five-minute taped interview down to one minute for the evening news, chances are he/she will use your general statement.
- Don't repeat an interviewer's words unless they reinforce what you wish to say. If an interviewer poses false premises in asking a question, correct him/her firmly and politely. Don't feel obligated to accept unfamiliar facts or figures.
- Use your time to set the record straight or present facts. You might say, “This is a common misperception. Here's why...”
- Use short words and simple declarative sentences. Avoid archaic terminology, jargon, and acronyms. Be descriptive, using images that the listener or viewer can picture.
- Telling something about yourself will “humanize” you to the audience. Relate personal experiences or illustrations of your work to support your statements and demonstrate your enthusiasm.

- If you use quotations, keep them short. If you can't recite the quotation verbatim, don't use it.
- If you don't know the answer to a question, simply say “I don't know, but I'll find out and get back to you.” If you have a legitimate reason for withholding certain information, politely indicate that the information is proprietary or confidential.

TIPS FOR NEWSPAPER INTERVIEWS

- Never speak off the record. Assume that everything you say will be reported, whether it's said before, during, or after an interview.
- Make sure that what you tell the reporter is what you want to see in print. If you are unhappy with the way you have phrased something, stop and rephrase or clarify your original statement. If you realize after the interview that you misstated a fact or phrased something poorly, call the reporter to correct the error.
- A newspaper reporter will not allow you to review copy before it is printed. You can, however, extend your influence over the article by inviting the reporter to call you for more information or clarification.

TIPS FOR TELEVISION AND RADIO INTERVIEWS

- Know the length of the interview before you go on. If you have only a brief interview, condense your answers by citing your main points quickly and simply. Think in terms of an outline rather than exposition.

- Before the interview begins, try to learn something about your host's likes, interests, and biases. This helps you involve him or her more personally in your conversation.
- Treat your host and the audience as you would friends. Be friendly, spontaneous, and responsive. With rare exception, the host will want you to look good so that he or she looks good. Relax – but stay mentally alert.
- It's perfectly all right to consult notes during the course of a radio interview. Put them on index cards. Paper sheets rustled next to a microphone sound like a barn fire.
- Radio interviews can sometimes be casual to the point at which the host forgets to tell you that you're on the air. As soon as you are seated in front of a microphone, ask when the interview will actually begin.
- On television, look your interviewer in the eye and call him or her by first name unless he or she is much older than you are. Ignore the technicians on the set and look at the camera only when you want to drive home a special point directly to the viewing audience.
- Gesture naturally, and vary your gestures.
- Men: Wear calf-length socks so that no bare skin shows when you cross your legs. If you have a heavy beard, shave just before air time because stubble is exaggerated on camera.
- Women: Wear solid colors (avoiding white or black). Keep jewelry to a minimum, and avoid jewelry that reflects light or makes noise.