

Media Interview Do's & Don'ts



**Concrete
Thinking**
for a sustainable world

DO ...

- "Flag" key points with phrases like, "The most important thing is ..." or "I think the bottom line is ..."
- Speak in easily understandable terms.
- Use facts and figures to demonstrate your credibility.
- Use illustrations and anecdotes to humanize and explain your topic. For example, "enough concrete to fill Yankee Stadium" is better than "575,000 yards of concrete."
- Be sensitive to reporters' deadlines.
- Be engaging, likable, enthusiastic—but not a cheerleader.
- Be yourself and be sincere. Don't try to reinvent yourself for an interview—you won't be credible.

DON'T ...

- Over-answer. When you're satisfied with your reply, stop.
- Be afraid to pause. Taking a few seconds to think will seem much longer to you than to the reporter or audience, and will make you appear thoughtful and deliberate.
- Allow yourself to be provoked. Keep cool.
- Fake the answer if you don't know it. If appropriate, assure the reporter you will provide the needed facts in a timely manner, or refer him or her to another source.
- Assume the reporter knows more about your area than you do. Usually, the reverse is true.
- Assume the microphone, camera or tape recorder is off immediately before or after an interview. Consider your entire interaction "on the record."
- Be surprised if the reporter has to cancel the interview at the last minute, due to breaking news. Try to reschedule the interview for a later time or date.
- Lie to a reporter. **Ever.**

Television Interview Tips

- Television interviews may be on site at a location you select and conducted by a mobile crew, or you may be asked to come to the station and be interviewed in the news studio.
- On average, pre-taped TV stories run about 80 seconds with only 10-15 seconds for sound bites. It is important to get to the point and be articulate and concise. Reporters typically ask a lot of questions—keep in mind that most are not used.
- Dress appropriately. Because television is a visual medium, your physical demeanor and the style of your presentation are just as important as what you say.
- Typically, a pre-interview precedes the actual on-camera interview. This is a chance for you to check out the personality and demeanor of the interviewer and to mention the topics(s) you would like to discuss during the interview.
- Whether an in-studio talk show format or a stand-up interview with a microphone at camera pointing at you, talk to the interviewer or other guests, not the camera. Stay attentive even when others are speaking.
- Hold your “interview attitude” until the interview is completely over, the camera is off and you have departed the premises.
- Avoid obvious signs of discomfort or nervousness, e.g., foot-tapping, clenched fists, shifting back and forth., etc.
- Don’t nod your head to indicate that you understand or are ready to answer the question. Inadvertently, this may convey agreement with the questioner’s premise when you don’t mean to do so.

Print Interview Tips

- Most newspaper interviews are conducted over the telephone. Print reporters generally have specific questions that may take 10-15 minutes to answer. An in-depth interview for a feature story generally requires 45 minutes to an hour. It is common for a reporter to call back several times to ensure that he or she has the correct details.
- If you tell the reporter you will get back to him or her with additional information, ask the reporter’s deadline and follow up in a timely manner.
- Feel free to ask whether the reporter plans to write a story using the interview, and if so, when it is likely to run. The reporter will rarely be able to tell you the exact running date, since editorial decisions are made on a day-to-day basis.
- Don't ask the reporter to see the story before it runs. You do not have the right to review it or change your quotes.

Radio Interview Tips

- Most radio interviews are conducted over the telephone and reporters are required to tell you when they are recording you for later play. A long radio story is 45 seconds. Talk shows, unlike interviews, allow you to portray a point unedited. This may include listener call-in options.
- On the radio, your voice establishes your image. Don’t speak in a monotone; modulate your voice and try to make it as expressive as possible.
- Speak at a normal level of loudness. Stress key points by raising your intensity level and pitch, not your voice.
- Use words to create an image or paint a picture of your story for the audience. Examples, anecdotes and illustrations are even more important in radio than in other media. If you’re part of a news story, try to localize your examples.

- When possible, personalize your delivery. If you're part of a talk program, ask what the host prefers to be called, and try to put the interview on a first-name basis.
- If responding to listener call-ins, don't let a hostile caller anger or fluster you. The most effective way to overcome hostile questions is to make your points firmly and politely and back up assertions with facts. Take the "high road" by responding to the issue behind the question, not the specific charge. Don't take comments personally.

Telephone Interview Tips

- Buy preparation time if possible. Tell the reporter you would be glad to talk, but are tied up at the moment. Find out the reporter's deadline, and set an acceptable time to get back to him or her. Stick to it. Even a delay of 10 minutes may be sufficient to help you prepare.
- Establish an "interview atmosphere" by isolating yourself with the telephone as much as possible. Close the door and turn over extraneous papers on your desk.
- Review your PCA message points and other relevant notes. Keep them in front of you during the interview, along with scratch paper to take additional notes.
- Since you can't see the face of the person at the other end of the phone, occasionally ask the reporter for feedback on your comments to ensure his or her understanding.