

MEDIA INTERVIEW TIPS

The media is one of your best tools for educating the public about your issue or cause. There are many [different tools](#) to share your story, one of which is doing an interview for print or broadcast media. If you've got an interview lined up, here are some important guidelines to remember as you prepare:

What to do:

1. Prepare and practice! If the interview set up in advance, research your interviewer or the station you'll be interviewing with to learn more about them, their priorities, common questions, etc. Rehearse answers to likely questions and consider any main points you want to be sure to mention.
2. Remember, reporters are people too! Good reporters work hard to establish rapport with their sources. When doing an interview, be carefully candid, polite, and above all, **honest**. Faced with good manners, a reporter is more likely to treat you the same way.
3. There is nothing that requires you to answer any question—or to talk to a reporter **at all**. If they call you on the phone and you aren't sure what you want to say, simply tell them: *"Let me call you back when I get the information you need. What's your phone number?"* or *"Can I direct you to someone better-suited to answer your questions?"*
4. Keep your answers short, simple and to the point. Avoid insider jargon and acronyms that may be unfamiliar to the interviewer.
5. Pause and think before answering questions. You don't have to rush to answer a question. Pause to collect your thoughts, breathe, and then answer. Speak slowly and clearly.
6. Stick to your [key message](#)! Try to keep the reporter focused on your main point and practice saying it in several different ways to get your point across. If the conversation is moving too far off track, you can steer the interview back to your message: *"But I really think the key issue is..."*
7. If you don't know the answer to a question, just say so! Don't be afraid to say, *"I don't know."* It is better to say you don't know the answer than to make one up that could be untrue or misleading.
8. Realize that only a small part of what you say will appear in print or be heard on the air. On average, soundbites are only about 7 seconds long. This is why you must be concise!
9. Thank your interviewer for the opportunity and their time.
10. If you are likely to be regularly interacting with the media, consider looking into media training workshops for you and your staff.

What NOT to do:

1. Unless you are an official spokesperson or staff member of an organization, speak only from your personal perspective. Do not speak for an entire community unless you have been asked to.
2. Don't talk too fast. Some reporters record comments, others will write them down. Either way, you want to make sure they are getting what you say correctly. Speak slowly and clearly.
3. Don't feel that you need to answer questions that are way off from your agenda. Deflect questions you do not wish to answer by introducing something else of interest. In this way, you may redirect the interview back to your main points. If you don't understand a question, simply ask that it be repeated.
4. DO NOT LIE! You will lose credibility and respect if you are found to have intentionally lied in an interview.
5. Don't be afraid to set the record straight, or to correct wrong impressions, terminology, or facts. You might say, *"This is a common misconception. Here's why..."* Consider yourself an educator.
6. Don't talk down to the reporter. If you need to explain something or educate them on a topic, do so without being condescending.
7. Don't lose your cool – even if you're seething inside. You can speak passionately, but any hostility will only drive away your potential media ally, or make you sound bad in a soundbite.
8. Don't ever assume you are speaking "off the record." The best policy is to talk only "on the record" and understand that everything you say can be quoted. Even if the reporter is not writing everything down doesn't mean they aren't remembering what you say. Some reporters don't use notes.
9. Don't say, "No comment." In print or on the air, that will usually appear as, *"_____ refused to comment"* which can make it look like you may be hiding something or evading the question. Instead, deflect the conversation back to your message. You can always begin that effort with: *"What's important here is..."* You can also explain why you cannot answer the question or give a comment, like if there are concerns of confidentiality or privacy. If you don't know the answer, tell them you don't know. If you are not the appropriate person to answer the question, connect them to the right person. Any response is better than no comment.