

Action Guide

DOING A MEDIA INTERVIEW

Knowing how to get your message across to the media can do a lot to actually get your message heard. Doing media interviews is one way to achieve this. The trick is to be prepared.

It's important to go into every media interview with your own messages – two or three points that you want to get across regardless of the questions you're asked.

Before the interview

Decide who is going to do the interview. It needs to be someone who is clued up on what to say and is comfortable doing it.

If you can't find anyone to do the interview, or you can't do it yourself, make a time with the reporter and, when you've found someone, get them to phone the reporter back and do the interview. Make sure the reporter is phoned back when agreed. Otherwise, you may find it hard to get the media interested next time you send out a media release or want some publicity.

Get prepared

When you get asked for an interview, ask the reporter what she or he wants to talk about before you agree to do it.

Once you know what the interview is about, you can prepare and think about the following:

- Who is the audience?
- Who is it you want to convince?
- What do you want them to know?
- Why does this issue matter?
- What do you want them to do (also known as a 'call to action')?

- Decide what message you want to send to those readers or listeners.
- Develop a punchy way to put your message across. You need to be able to sum it up in a short sentence. It should use everyday words that everyone understands.
- Don't try to memorise what you want to say because it will sound rehearsed. Practise your key points so you're familiar with them and comfortable when you answer questions.
- Try to figure out what the tough questions may be and plan the answers beforehand. If you find it helpful, get someone to practise the interview with you.

During the interview

First, be yourself. Warmth and enthusiasm work with most reporters and will come across well on radio and TV. Remember to keep to your topic, don't ramble and focus on sticking to the question.

- If you don't understand the question, tell the reporter and get them to ask it in a different way.
- If you don't know an answer to a question, be honest and say you don't know. You can suggest that you will get back to them with an answer later on, when you've had a chance to find the information they asked for.

- Speak clearly and take your time. There is no need to rush. Think about the answer in your mind first.
- Whenever you can, use the points you've decided you need to make when you answer the reporter's questions. Don't leave them to the end. They are far less likely to get into the story.
- If you disagree with something the interviewer says in a question, say so when you start to answer. The disagreement must come right after the question, so it won't get cut out when the interview is edited.
- If a question gives you a set of choices, you don't have to accept them. You can offer your own alternative, e.g. "If the skate park stays open, the council won't be able to afford the new daycare centre. Which would you choose?" "We would like the opportunity to look at how we can help, as there are fundraising activities we can explore."
- If a reporter asks you a lot of questions at once, pick the question that makes it easiest for you to get to your message across and answer it. If you think you've made a mistake or said something that's wrong, don't be frightened to tell the reporter or ask them to fix it.
- ENJOY IT – it's your chance to say what you want to say!

TIPS FOR RADIO AND TV

Things you need to know

With radio and TV, it is important that you put your message into a very short answer. Always make your key point first and be clear. After you've made your key point, add background information – since the interview will be edited later, it gives you the best chance to get your point in.

If you are going to be on a show, watch or listen to it first. Get a feel for the interviewer and how the show works. Make sure you find out when the show will be on and how long it is.

If you get interrupted, don't get louder or faster. You are likely to look out of control if you do. Keep your voice and speed steady and keep talking. Most important, stick to what you were saying and don't get side-tracked.

Always assume that you are on camera – you may be.

Always assume that any microphone is on – it might be.

Tips for radio

If you're doing a radio interview, the rules are the same, but the approach is slightly different. Because no one can see you or read what you have said, your voice and how you use it is really important. This may sound strange, but how your voice sounds will affect how other people 'see you'.

For example, if you sound bored, people will think you are boring. If you sound cheerful and enthusiastic (even if you're not feeling it), people will think that you and whatever you are talking about is interesting.

By sounding passionate and interested in what you are talking about, others will feel inspired too.

Tips for TV

- When you are on TV, smile (unless the subject matter is sad). If you don't smile, you will look unfriendly.
- On TV, always look at the reporter. Never look at the camera – you'll just look weird.

Things to remember

- You don't have to give an interview to a reporter. You always have the choice to say that you aren't able to comment.
- Never lie to a reporter. If you are found out, you'll lose all your credibility with the reporters (and the public if the lie becomes a part of the story).
- Don't exaggerate (don't say hundreds of people will be affected by this issue if you can only prove 50 will).
- Don't say anything to a reporter that you don't want to read about in the paper or hear about on TV.

Avoid making 'off the record' comments to a reporter, because it is likely that some reporters will still report 'off the record' comments. It's better not to say anything you don't want reported.