

Interviews

Tricks of the trade

Whether you are responding to a call from a reporter or pitching a story, there are a few things you want to establish at the outset:

- Be prepared—know your subject and anticipate likely questions
- Write down your key points, and stick to them
- Be honest. If you don't know the answer to a question, offer to get back to them with an answer (and then do), or refer them to another resource
- Keep in mind that you are never really “off the record”
- When a reporter calls, get their name, contact information, and deadline. To better understand the context for the interview, ask the reporter about their angle and plans for the story, including other people they plan to call.

TALKING TO REPORTERS: DOS/DON'TS

- DO keep in mind a couple of main points you want to be sure to make. Write down 2-3 points before you talk to a reporter, if you have time, and...
- DON'T worry about repeating yourself.
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- DO be pleasant but firm. Stick to your guns on each point you are trying to make, but be polite when doing so.
- DON'T use acronyms or inside vernacular. We all have language we use with people who are involved in the same work or other activities. Remember that a reporter may not have the same background or understanding.
- DON'T be afraid of silence. An old reporter trick is to leave a lengthy pause in the hopes that you'll move from your prepared remarks to “juicier” unscripted content. This is when you'll say things you didn't intend to say. Say what you want to say and then stop.
- DO be truthful and accurate and speak about what you know. There is no problem in saying “I don't know” or “I'll have to get back to you.”
- DON'T answer a hypothetical question, validate a false assumption or let a reporter put words in your mouth. This can happen when a reporter is trying to make sense of your story within the context of the news.
- DON'T assume any level of knowledge. In most cases, reporters know less than you think they do.
- DO be respectful of a reporter's deadline. If you need to return a phone call, ask about their deadline and be sure to get back to them as soon as you can.

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- DON'T be afraid to pause and gather your thoughts.
- DO include examples and personal stories to illustrate your point.
- DON'T rely on facts and figures alone. One strong fact to validate your story or example is perfect.

TIPS FOR RADIO INTERVIEWS

Sandwiched between the security of a familiar newspaper reporter and the lure of a smashing TV expose, it is easy to underestimate the power of an excellent radio interview. Radio is the second most common media in Americans' lives (93% of us use or own one vs. 98% for TV). And radio listeners have enormous faith in what they hear on air. NPR listeners are about three times as likely to trust what they hear on the radio than that they see on TV. The commercial success of conservative talk radio is another testament to radio audiences' commitment.

Here are eight tips to help you nail your radio interview:

1. Know the format

Find out if the interview will be live, live-to-tape, or recorded for inclusion in a story. Will there be other guests or will it be one-on-one with the host? How long will it be? What topics are of greatest interest?

2. Use notes

Decide the points you want to drive home (one main point and two supporting points is usually sufficient for a short interview) and WRITE THEM DOWN. Have a compelling statistic to make your main point memorable. Keep your notes in front of you during the interview. It's radio—no one can see you!

3. Stay on point

Consider how each question relates to the question you want to answer and pivot back to your message. They can only use what you say, not what they wish you had said.

4. Take your time

Give yourself time to formulate your reply ("That's an interesting question...") Don't speak too quickly. Unlike on TV, listeners can't see your lips. If they can't keep up, they can't absorb your message.

5. Ask for a do-over

During a recorded interview, if you trip up on your words or think of a better answer mid-stream it's ok to stop mid sentence and ask to start your answer over again. Remember, the host isn't out to get you. She wants you to make smart points and sound intelligent making them.

6. Don't be afraid of silence.

Remember the old reporter trick of using silence to entice you into saying more than you would like. When you're done with your answer, stop talking. Wait for the host to make the next move. It's not your job to fill the silence.

7. Talk to the host, not to the audience

Imagining thousands of people listening is a sure way to wander off message.

8. Embrace your jitters

It's OK to be nervous. It only means that you want to do a good job. Harness your nerves, breathe deep, and knock it out of the park.