



# TIPS FOR SPEAKING WITH MEDIA

If a reporter calls, determine the topic and the deadline. Call them back before their deadline.

## QUICKLY PREPARE

- Know what you want to communicate. Plan to make your points accordingly.
- Review key messages. Obtain background on the reporter and angle, if available.
- Call the reporter back, as promised.

## GENERAL INTERVIEW “DOS”

- Look for ways to quickly bridge from the reporter’s question to one of your key messages.
- Maintain a positive tone, but be realistic, responsive, and factual.
- Use short answers rather than long ones.
- Answer in complete sentences.
- Keep your cool. Don’t allow yourself to be provoked.
- Stick to what you know. If you don’t know the answer, say so, and offer to find out.

## GENERAL INTERVIEW “DON’TS”

- Never lie to or mislead a reporter.
- Avoid industry jargon or acronyms.
- Don’t build to your point gradually. Instead, state your message first, and then back it up with facts, examples, or real-life stories.
- Don’t talk too much. Stick to your messages, and then stop when you’re done.
- Don’t overlap the interviewer’s question; begin your answer when the reporter is finished.
- Don’t automatically accept a reporter’s facts and figures as true; don’t respond to a hypothetical situation; respond to negative leading questions with positive statements.
- Don’t go “off the record.” Remember, there is no real beginning or end to an interview. Everything within earshot is fair game.
- Don’t ask to approve the story before it runs or airs.

## PHONE INTERVIEWS

- Buy time to prepare if caught by surprise. Offer to call back in 10 minutes.
- Establish an “interview atmosphere.” Close the door and turn over extraneous papers on your desk.
- Review your message points and keep them in front of you during the interview.

- 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/her understanding.

## TELEVISION INTERVIEWS

- A broadcast interviewer may want a “voice level” to set his recorder sound.
- Medium to dark clothes look best. Solid blues look best on television.
- Be sure the setting is appropriate.
- Take time to straighten your hair, tie, and shirt. Have another person review your appearance.
- Remove photo-gray glasses.
- Stand up straight; look directly at the reporter, not at the camera or the mic.
- Smile only at appropriate times.
- Resist the urge to shout into the microphone.
- Following an interview, the cameraman may want to shoot additional video. The reporter will ask you to chat about the weather, Sunday’s game, etc. Be sure your behavior is in accordance with your posture during the interview

## RADIO INTERVIEWS

- In radio, your voice **IS** your image. Don’t speak in a monotone, modulate your voice and try to make it as expressive as possible.
- Speak at a normal volume. Stress key points by raising your intensity level and pitch, not your voice.
- Use examples, anecdotes and illustrations to paint a picture of your story for the audience. If you’re part of a news story, try to localize your examples.
- Personalize your delivery. If you’re part of a talk program, ask what the host/hostess prefers to be called, and try to put the interview on a first-name basis.
- It’s OK to keep message points, key facts, notes, etc. in front of you to refer to.
- If responding to listener call-ins, don’t let hostile callers 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.