



Being interviewed for TV and radio

Preparation

Before you agree...

If you are invited to speak on local radio or TV about a story involving your meeting find out the following basic information:

- What sort of questions will you be asked?
- Where and how long will the interview be?
- Live or recorded?
- Will anyone else be interviewed or is it one-to-one?
- When will the interview be broadcast?
- Having decided to go ahead...
- Think about the purpose of your interview. For example do you want to:
- Inform the public about your project?
- Influence public perception?

Know your audience

Think about who you are talking to. Use plain, everyday language. Do not use jargon.

Key messages

- Prepare two or three key messages. Decide what your most important two or three points are and resolve to put these points across, whatever the questions. Most interviews are only two or three minutes long so decide on your most important point first. Resolve to get your key messages across whatever the questions. It is YOUR interview.
- Prepare concise answers to likely questions, remembering your key messages. Practise with a friend.
- Prepare a 2-sentence soundbite summary of your project, ready for very open questions such as "What's it about?"
- Don't flag up no-go areas that might be embarrassing. It will increase curiosity.

Before the interview

- Ask how they will introduce you.
- Ask what their first question will be.

During the interview

How to say what you want to say:

- Try to start with your most important point, in case the interview is cut short.
- Keep answers concise. Don't waffle.
- Avoid jargon and use everyday conversational language. Don't assume prior knowledge.
- Always be courteous. Don't try to score points or be "clever".
- Try to answer the question – but say what you want to say.
- Be honest and open – but be careful not to mention anything you'd rather not be drawn on.
- Don't repeat negative words from the question in your answer. Eg in answer to the question: "Aren't you being naïve...?" Don't say: "No, we're not naïve we're...". Do say, for example: "On the contrary, all the statistics prove..." and move on to make your point

Some other useful phrases to help you steer the interview in your direction are:

- That's a good point, but...
 - That's important, but...
 - What that means is...
 - Let me put that in perspective...
 - Let's remember that...
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- When quoting statistics, round them up or down, to make them easier for the audience to remember.
 - Don't just give facts. Explain the whys, and give examples/analogies where appropriate.
 - Try to avoid saying "No comment" unless there are real, given reasons for not answering the question, eg legality. Use a phrase which will enable you to move the answer away from the no-go area.

Presentation

- Suit your tone to the message eg serious/light/enthusiastic
- Speak slowly. This will give authority to your voice. It will also help to calm your nerves, think about what you say and keep the attention of your audience.
- Emphasise key words and use pauses for effect. TV and radio can have a flattening effect on the voice, so it is good to dramatise a little.
- Don't be afraid of pauses. Make your point concisely then stop and wait for the next question.
- On TV wear plain colours and quiet patterns. Avoid loud, distracting clothes and jewellery. An all-white outfit can dazzle; all-black looks sepulchral.
- It is important to keep strong eye contact. Looking away can look shifty. Look at the reporter unless directed otherwise. (Don't stare though!)
- Be careful what you say near the camera/mikes when the interview is over – they may still be running. Don't immediately rush off because the camera will remain running for a second or two.

Finally, remember that it is your interview, not the reporter's. Treat the questions as a springboard for your own agenda!

The more you practise the easier it gets! You can gain practice at speaking on radio by offering yourself on hospital radio discussions, local radio newspaper review slots, or pre-recorded faith slots on local radio stations.

Find out if your local college or university runs a media studies course – they always need volunteers to carry out dummy interviews for course assessments. Offering yourself as a volunteer is a painless and risk-free way of getting used to the questions and procedures around broadcast interviews.

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