

## MEDIA INTERVIEW TECHNIQUES

In advocacy, understanding the key techniques of media training is vital. Without proper preparation, a spokesperson not only risks missing out on the great opportunity that positive media coverage provides, but also risks damaging their organisation if they are unable to convincingly answer the sort of searching, challenging questions that journalists can often ask.

Here's a ten-step guide to the essentials that all interviewees need to know.

1. **Know your advocacy goals and objectives.** You shouldn't even think of giving an interview until you've decided what you want to achieve. Try to steer clear of wishy-washy objectives like raising awareness or enhancing understanding. Make your objective action-orientated by asking yourself what you want the audience to *do differently*.
2. **Decide on two or three key messages.** One of the most common mistakes people make when they start doing media interviews is to think that it's simply a matter of answering questions. But that merely helps the journalists get what *they* want. To make sure that you also get what *you* want, your agenda—your key two or three messages—must help you achieve your advocacy objective.
3. **Make sure your key messages answer the journalist's "so what?" test.** Look at each of your messages from the journalist's point of view, and ask yourself whether they satisfy their need for a newsworthy story, one that is relevant to their audience. Will your messages make the journalist say "so what?" If there's any danger that they will, tear them up and start again.
4. **Hone your messages to ten words or fewer.** Your two or three topline messages should be crisp, memorable and succinct. They should just trip off the tongue without the journalist needing to interpret or summarise them.

5. **Find compelling examples and evidence to support your messages.** Every message needs to be backed up by good human examples and, ideally, killer facts or statistics. A good example is one where the journalist and their readers, viewers or listeners can actually *visualise* what you're saying. So keep digging into the layers of human detail until you're sure that you're creating a colourful *mind picture* for your audience. If your message is that your company's new software will save time and money, your example—real or hypothetical—should paint the picture of a typical user of that software and show *how* it saves time and money for *them*.
6. **Structure your answers as “message sandwiches”.** Get your message out in ten words or fewer, and then go straight into your example, backed up by a well-chosen fact or statistic. Then briefly repeat the message. This message sandwich is the best way of making your messages *unmissable*.
7. **Bridge into your key messages.** Few journalists will ask questions that merely invite you to impart your key messages. Most likely they will also ask you awkward, hostile or aggressive questions. The key here is preparation. It's no good going into an interview *hoping* you won't be asked your killer question. You must assume you *will* be asked it, and work out exactly what you'll say in response. Then *bridge* from your answers back to your key messages. Remember the **ABC**: Answer the question; Bridge; Communicate your message.
8. **Use a W.I.S.E tone.** You should be looking to communicate with **Warmth**, **Intelligence**, **Sincerity** (i.e. openness and honesty) and **Enthusiasm**. Most people struggle with warmth and enthusiasm, and for good reason: it can be uncomfortable giving a media interview. And when we are uncomfortable, our natural warmth and enthusiasm close off. To achieve warmth and enthusiasm in spite of this discomfort, you can employ two cast-iron methods: 1. Keep your language as conversational as possible, free of formal terminology or jargon. 2. Paint mind pictures, so that you are inviting the journalist and their audience to visualise your examples.

9. **Remember the vital importance of good body language.** You must not rely on content alone to communicate. You must communicate physically too. If you tell the audience that you are excited, but look and sound bored to tears, the audience will also feel bored to tears and will assume you are too. If you convey uncertain body language (e.g. poor eye contact or poor posture) and a lack of vocal conviction (e.g. mumbling and hesitancy), people are more likely to trust the non-verbal signals than the verbal ones.
  
10. **Be yourself.** The most successful interviewees—the ones that journalists want to interview over and over again—are authentic and natural. There is no act. They are themselves.

*Source: Robert Taylor; <https://www.agilitypr.com/pr-news/pr-tools/facing-the-press-ten-steps-to-giving-a-great-media-interview/>*