

Media Interviews

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Hello!



- **Who am I?**
 - Currently run a public relations agency & we help to support AAPA
 - Teach crisis communications at Georgetown University
 - Write columns for PR News and Business Insider
 - Formerly served as Director of Global Engagement at the White House
 - Was an American diplomat for twelve years, working as a spokesperson at US embassies in Iraq, Madagascar, and Ivory Coast

Our Session

- Message
- Rules of the Road
- Print Interviews
- Broadcast Interviews



What's your message

- Spend the time to boil down your main point to a simple, sticky phrase
 - That's your main point, other messages are branches
- Don't try to pack in too much and avoid details
 - How would your kids describe it to a friend?
- Not what you want to say, it's how the target audience needs to hear it
 - What can they relate to? Are there analogies that apply?
- Consider the news angle and how your message fits in
 - What's the context and connection?

An Example

- **The Start**
 - Our organization increased efficiency by 115% percent over the last year, because of our QRF process that was implemented across all offices, including in the sub-remote spaces.
- **The Simple**
 - Children across our community got an extra 30 minutes with their parents tonight, thanks to the hard work of our team.

On the record, on background, off the record...

- **On the record**
 - Reporters can use what you say and attribute it directly to you
- **On background**
 - Reporters can use what you say, but not attribute it directly to you
- **Off the record**
 - Reporters can be aware of what you share, but not mention it in their coverage

Background information goes on background

- Educate the reporter/producer before starting the interview
- Will improve the quality of questions
- Set ground rules for what will be covered
- Don't waste your quote sharing facts and figures
- Instead, your quote should convey your/your organization's perspective on the situation
- The rest can be shared on background, allowing the reporter to use it, but still maximizes the media opportunity

Few words of caution

- Everything you say can be used, keep your guard up – even after the interview
- Microphones should always be treated as if they're on
- Research the reporter, outlet before accepting an interview – understand their bias
- Use a communications professional as intermediary, if you have one
- Ask who else they are interviewing, what else they have heard on the topic
- Reporters may try to ask loaded questions, defuse or deflect them

- **Keep interviews short, focused**

Reporters

- They increasingly have very short deadlines
- Tend to have a critical, even cynical eye
- Looking for an angle, hook, or a news peg – meaning it has to relate to something their bosses consider news worth
- Clicks are driving a lot of the coverage today, so they are interested in headlines people will be curious to open
- Some have “beats” or broad areas of specialty like health
- Most are on general assignment, meaning they cover anything any everything



Print Interview Tips

Opening

- Before it starts, ask the reporter a few questions not related to topic
- No matter what the first question is, always pivot to what you want to say first
- Allows you to frame the discussion going forward



During

- Repeat, repeat, repeat your core message
- Put technical details on background, everything on record can be used
- Use simple language
- Flag your most important points
- Personal anecdotes and vibrant language to illustrate key messages



Deflecting/Declining

- Acknowledge line of inquiry and shift to core message
- If reporter presses again, rinse and repeat
- Keep the reporter on topic
- “This isn’t my area of expertise” is always an acceptable answer



Summarizing

- Don't let reporter go before you reinforce your main message
- "I want to come back to the main takeaways"
- Take chance to rephrase and tighten up answers to questions
- Thank the reporter for their interest and time



Broadcast Interview Tips

Setting up at Home - Video

- Computer camera at eye-level
- Light source behind camera
- Close all blinds and shades
- Do not set up in front of a plain background



Setting up at Home - Audio

- Do not set up outside
- Quiet room with no distractions
- Bedrooms work well to avoid echo
- Turn off alarms, alerts, phone, other devices that could go off



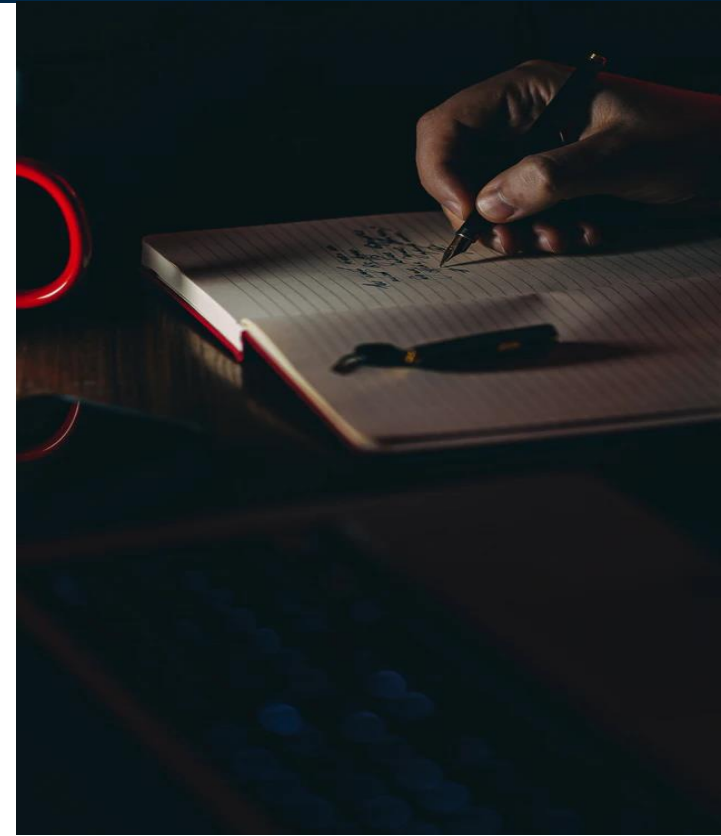
Getting Set

- Look directly at camera, smile and nod head slowly when not talking
- Place hands together, raise them gently to make points, don't touch mic
- Avoid clothes with lines & patterns and take off glasses
- Use solid color jackets, blue is the best



Before - Script

- Envision the ideal interview and script the start of what you want to say
- Should be no more than 1 key point and a clever phrase
- Prepare at least 1 page of points
- Have several versions of answers to the same question



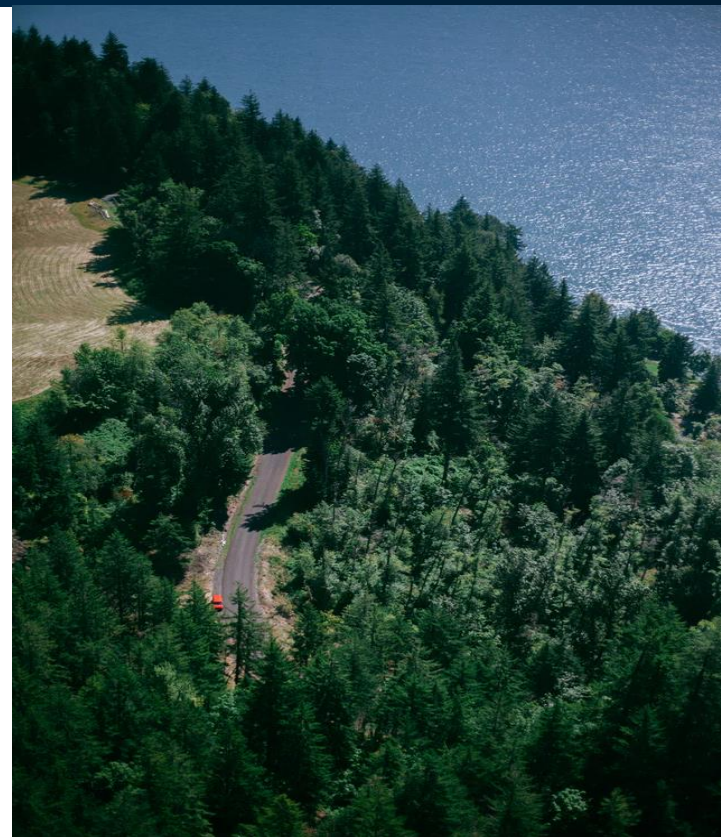
Before - Counters

- Ask yourself what the most challenging questions might be
- Everyone has fallback words, think of alternatives instead
- Practice saying key points out loud
- Get a feel for which points should be emphasized and where to add gestures



During - General Guidelines

- No matter the question, stick to your frame
- Always repeat your key points
- Interviewers often don't have familiarity with your issue
- Simple vocabulary
- Avoid complicated conversations and stay at a 10,000 foot level



During - Speaking Tips

- Don't have to answer the question asked, you can drive the discussion with pivots
- If you make a mistake, don't pause just move on
- Don't have to say anything when interviewer thanks you for joining
- No "that's a great question", dive straight into points
- Pause instead of umm



During - Wrapping Up

- If the interviewer speaks towards the end of the interview, they are likely wrapping up
- Quickly conclude or you'll get cut off
- When interviewer says “we only have a few seconds”, they probably have more
- They're signaling that you should give a short response



In Summary

- It's like sailing, you set your mark on the horizon and tact back and forth as the winds shift – always staying the course
- Unlike other presentations you may have done, media interviews are less about the content and more about creative twists of a phrase, performance
- Make it personal, less about a policy or process
- Focus less on the question that was asked and more on what you would like to say
- **Remember to repeat, repeat, and repeat again**

