

The Fifteen-Minute Guide to the Media, Interviews, and Public Speaking

Before the Interview – Forewarned is Forearmed

Before you begin a TV interview, knowing the following can greatly boost your understanding of the media:

- **Television and radio are very event-dependent** – If something more newsworthy comes up, expect that you will be bumped off-air. This should not be taken personally as it's the media's job to cover the most newsworthy happenings. You may also be requested to go on earlier, later, or on another day due to breaking news. Try to plan an extra hour off before and after the interview in case timelines change.
- **There is preparation before the interview** – Unless there is a major time crunch, expect that when you arrive the media will apply makeup to you, and that you will be "miked-up" too. If the media does attach a microphone to you, it will typically be a clip-on microphone that snaps to your collar. You may also have a battery pack for the microphone attached above your waist on your back. Always assume that once you are "miked up," that someone could be listening to your every word. You might want to take it off before that final trip to the bathroom.
- **The floor director/newsroom technician calls the shots** – There is always somebody in charge on the newsroom floor, typically the floor director or some newsroom technician. Make sure you know who this is, and listen carefully for instructions from him/her.

The Best Seat in the House

Where you sit and where you hold the interview conveys more than you might think. Here is a list of things you should consider when planning:

- Sitting behind a desk puts distance between you and the reporter. Unless you want to appear distant and business-like, avoid this option.
- Sitting in swivel chairs leads to you spinning on camera.
- Sitting back in a chair makes you look relaxed and disengaged. This often happens when sitting on a couch, so avoid couches if possible.
- Standing up for quick interviews is fine so long as the reporter is standing as well. Remember though, if the interview will be more than a minute, try to sit down so you don't become restless or tired.
- Doing interviews outside is not recommended. Street noise causes you to speak louder, making it sound like you're yelling at the reporter. If possible, try to do the interview indoors.
- You also leave yourself open in an uncontrolled environment, meaning people may walk in front of you or wave (among other things) into the camera from behind you.

Your best option:

Do the interview indoors with two non-swivel chairs – one for you, and one for the reporter.

Adapted From: "The Art Exposing Yourself in Public." Produced by Phil Reiner Communications. Created by the British Columbia Medical Association. 1989 Philmer Marketing

Mincing Words

Depending on which medium is doing the questioning, you may be interviewed in different ways. Newspapers and radio interviews are typically done over the telephone. TV interviews are typically done in studio, but a reporter could also be dispatched to meet you. Regardless of where or what type of media is interviewing you, remember the following:

- 1) Don't use big words, acronyms (unless you spell out the acronym first), or specialized language. This doesn't impress, it depresses.
- 2) Don't read from prepared statements or reports, it's boring and it will not get on the air.
- 3) Don't repeat something the reporter says that you disagree with or that labels you.
- 4) Don't include the reporter in your opinion. If you use the reporter's first name, (i.e. "Well Max, as you know ...") it appears as though you are familiar with the reporter.
- 5) Don't expect to control the tone of the story. Expect fairness, nothing more.
- 6) Only say "no comment" with a reason, such as "no comment because it's before the courts," or "no comment because I'm not the right person." "No comment" suggests you have something to hide. Try to avoid it if you can.
- 7) When on TV, always make eye contact with the reporter because the camera is always on.
- 8) If a cutaway is being used on television (the transition period between an interview and the commercials) keep your reactions neutral.

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What to Wear on Air

Good news! You're going to be on TV! Now, the only problem is you'll need to figure out what to wear. Here are some dos and don'ts for your television interview wardrobe choices.

Good Choices:

- Clothes you feel comfortable in. If you feel comfortable in the clothes you're in, you'll seem more relaxed on camera.
- Professional, and semi-casual business like attire.
- Anything that hugs your body well without looking too tight.

Bad Choices:

- Bright white clothing. It causes problems for the focusing systems of most video cameras and makes your skin look very dark.
- Patterned sweaters or tweed. This sort of clothing causes a colour buzz-like pattern to appear on the television screen.
- Double-breasted suits. When sitting, double-breasted suits gape open and don't hug your body well. If you have to wear a suit, consider unbuttoning it first.
- Deep or saturated colors like bright red, as well as anything that may look "busy."
- Jewelry that could reflect light or rub against the microphone.
- Large jewelry that becomes the subject of focus. Hint: it should be you, not what you wear!

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Techniques for Involving Your Audience

If you want more active listeners, you need to involve your audience. Try the following techniques to get their attention.

- 1) **Be dramatic** – Exaggerate movements and use a wide range of vocal tones. It might seem awkward to you, but to the audience you'll seem much more charismatic and involved.
- 2) **Eye contact** – Look at different sections of the audience and hold your gaze for at least five seconds. Entire groups of people will think you're talking directly to them, even if you're not.
- 3) **Move** – Move away between questions if given the chance while standing, but when people ask you a question, take at least two steps towards them.
- 4) **Visual aids** – Use these as much as you can. The more you have, the better, but remember, no visual aid should be more important than your explanation – unless that's the effect you purposely want to achieve.
- 5) **Question & answer sessions** – Quiz your audience by asking them questions, and let them quiz you by answering theirs. This is one of the most effective ways of involving an audience.
- 6) **Give commands** – This could include commands like “write this down,” or “you really want to pay attention to this.” This involves the audience, and forces them to do something.
- 7) **Use gimmicks** – If you can think of a clever gimmick to hold audience attention do it. The average adult's attention span is only eight seconds. If you want more attention, you'll have to do something that warrants it.
- 8) **Speak to listener interests** – Don't speak to your own interests, speak to theirs. Why should the audience care? If you adopt an audience focus with your speaking style, you'll hold their attention longer.

Adapted from: “How to Speak with Confidence.” By Bert Decker. Produced by Nightingale-Conant Corporation. Chicago, IL. 1987.

Strategies for Overcoming Confusion / Misinformation

- 1) State the misconception.
- 2) Acknowledge its believability and the reason(s) that it's believable.
- 3) Reject the misconception by providing contrary evidence.
- 4) State and explain the more acceptable or accurate belief.

Adapted from: “Pocket Keys for Speakers.” By Isa Engleberg & Ann Raimos. Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, MA. 2004. p129.

How to Explain Difficult Concepts

- 1) Define or list the concept's essential features. Explain how it differs from other related concepts.
- 2) Use typical examples.
- 3) Contrast examples and non-examples. (For example: The opposite of communism is capitalism, not democracy. Antibiotics treat bacterial infections, not viral infections, colds, or the flu).
- 4) Quiz the audience. Pose questions and be sure to give audience members time to think about their responses. Then make sure you provide the right answers to your questions.

Adapted from: “Pocket Keys for Speakers.” By Isa Engleberg & Ann Raimos. Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, MA. 2004. Pg.131.

Quick Tips

- When speaking, make eye contact with the camera at the beginning of the sentence, not just the end.
- Look at audience members' foreheads when intimidated.
- Sometimes you'll be asked to show props on TV, meaning your hands will be seen on camera. Always keep your hands clean, and remove dirt under your nails. Also avoid wearing flashy rings.

Handling Presentation Aids

Presentations aids (physical objects, models, charts, graphs, etc.) help to make a dull topic interesting. While a presentation aid gives the audience a visual reference, a presentation aid on its own is still not enough to be effective without your explanation. One of the best ways to get the most out of presentation aids is to follow these four guidelines:

- 1) **Focus on your audience, not on your aids** – Be careful not to turn your back to an audience or camera while presenting your visual aid. One of the most effective ways of presenting is using the **Touch; Turn; Talk** rule. Touch your aid (or point to it with a pointer or hand), turn towards the audience, and then talk.
- 2) **Pick the right time to display your aids** – Make sure you decide when to present your aids, how long to leave the aids up, and when the aids need to be removed. Also remember that an aid typically needs to be displayed for at least 10 seconds to be effective.
- 3) **Begin with yourself, not your aid** – The most effective way to begin and end a presentation is by making eye contact with the audience. No matter how many aids you have to display, always make eye contact at the beginning and end of your presentation.
- 4) **Be prepared to do without** – Presentation aids are there to assist you, but there are times where something may get displaced and you may have to do without it. Prepare a backup presentation plan in the event you are pulled away from your exhibit to do an interview, or in case something goes missing from your display.
- 5) **If you have multiple aids, use grouping** – People remember things best in groups of three. When more than three things are presented, the audience tends to remember only the first and last things presented. Try to group similar objects as much as possible.

Adapted from: "Pocket Keys for Speakers." By Isa Engleberg & Ann Raimes. Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, MA. 2004. Pg.123, 124.

Overcoming Fear

Having a fear of public speaking is normal. Believe it or not, some studies have indicated people fear public speaking more than dying! It may not be possible to overcome all your fear of speaking, but there are ways to reduce it. Try the following for starters:

- 1) **Know your topic well** – Research your topic and practice speaking about it with others.
- 2) **Practice your speech out loud, preferably in front of people you trust** – It is not enough to read through your notes silently, you must read your notes out loud and understand the material.
- 3) **Use relaxation and redirection techniques to reduce the tension caused by the physiological effects of fear** –
 - a) Physiological effects include increased heart rate, sweaty palms, dry mouth, blushing, sweating, and upset stomach. These physiological effects are normal.
 - b) Relax by taking a deep breath and releasing it slowly. Stretching, yoga, and meditation are effective relaxation techniques.
 - c) Redirect your energy to turn your fear into power. For example, increased heart rate can be used to project your voice and create dynamism.
 - d) Replace negative thoughts with positive ones. "I'm going to forget my speech" can be replaced with, "I know my material and I've practiced it out loud several times."

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*This document was prepared by Dean Morin, public relations student, Algonquin College.
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