

BRAIN AWARENESS WEEK

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Tips for Media Interviews

General Techniques for Media Interviews

Before the interview:

- Know your purpose. Prepare two or three essential points that you want to get across during the interview.
- Support your points with facts or anecdotes from your experience.
- There is no substitute for preparation. Study your subject and ask your friends, family, and colleagues to conduct mock interviews as practice.
- Consider your interview an "enlarged conversation" and speak as naturally as you would to another person.

During the Interview:

- Before you begin to speak, smile at the interviewer to establish a rapport.
- Use vocal variety. Let your voice and your delivery reflect the full spectrum of emotions and points of emphasis.
- Use gestures that complement the expression of your ideas. Avoid distracting, meaningless movements.
- Maintain eye contact throughout the interview and keep an "open," friendly face.
- Communicate total enthusiasm and involvement in your subject.

Getting Your Point Across:

- Be assertive - in a pleasant way - so that the conversation centers on subjects you want to talk about. One way to do this is to respond to a narrow question with a very broad answer that encompasses the facts or opinions you need to get across.
- Listen carefully to the question. If you consider it difficult, pause before you answer to give yourself time to formulate a response. If you don't understand a question, ask that it be repeated.
- Be careful not to repeat an interviewer's words, unless they reinforce what you wish to say. If an interviewer poses false premises in asking a question, correct him/her firmly but politely.
- Don't feel obligated to accept unfamiliar facts or figures.
- Use your time to set the record straight or present facts. You might say, "This is a common misperception. Here's why..."
- Deflect questions you do not wish to answer by introducing something else of interest. In this way, you may redirect the interview to the subject you wish to convey.
- Don't try to answer hypothetical questions; they tend to obscure your true position. Turn the tables by clearly stating your general position and then offering your own example.
- Use short words and simple, declarative sentences. Avoid scientific terminology. Be descriptive, using images that the listener can picture.

- Use analogies whenever possible to simplify and dramatize your main points. Where appropriate, relate personal experiences or illustrations of your work to support your statements. Telling something about yourself will "humanize" you to the audience.
- If you use quotations, keep them short. If you can't recite the quotation verbatim, don't use it.
- If you don't know the answer to a question simply say, "I don't know, but I'll find out the answer and get back to you." If you have a legitimate reason for withholding certain information then politely say it's confidential or proprietary.
- Use the Inverse Pyramid in structuring responses. Start with a general statement that sums up your position or philosophy succinctly and accurately. In the second part of your answer you should narrow down your response by giving the specifics of why you feel the way you do. This approach is particularly valuable for radio and television. If a producer decides to cut your five minute taped interview down to one minute for the evening news, chances are he/she will use your general statement.

Tips for Television and Radio

General:

- Treat your host and the audience as you would friends. Be friendly, spontaneous, and responsive.
- Know the length of your interview before you go on. If you have only a brief interview condense your answers citing your main points quickly. Think in terms of outline rather than exposition.
- Before the interview begins, try to learn something about your host's likes, interests, and prejudices. This helps you involve him/her more personally in your conversation.
- Don't think of your host as an adversary. With rare exception, he/she will want you to look good so that he/she looks good. Relax, but stay mentally alert.
- Most interview programs will have the host or someone from the production staff "pre-interview" you before you go on, if only for a minute. This will establish what is expected of you, the direction the interviewer intends to take, and how much time you will be allotted. If no one goes over your presentation with you, ask if some time could be made available for this purpose.
- It's perfectly all right to consult notes during the course of the radio interview. Put them on index cards - sheets of paper rustled next to a microphone sound like a barn fire.
- Radio interviews can sometimes be casual to the point of the host forgetting to tell you that you are on the air. As soon as you are seated in front of a microphone, ask when the interview will actually begin.
- On television, look your interviewer in the eye and call him/her by his/her first name, unless he/she is much older than you. Ignore the technicians on the set and look at the camera only when you want to drive home a special point directly to the viewing audience.
- Defensive body language like wringing hands, folding arms across the chest, clenching fists, or narrowing eyes should be avoided. Gesture naturally, and vary your gestures.
- Men are advised to wear calf-length hose so that no bare skin shows when legs are crossed. If possible, men with heavy beards should shave just before air time, since stubble is exaggerated on camera.
- Women should wear solid colors (avoid white or black) and keep jewelry to a minimum. Avoid jewelry that reflects light or makes noise.

Responding to Audience questions:

- Many radio and television programs use question and answer call-in formats to encourage audience participation. You will find most of the questions that arise are easy to handle.
- Calls are screened by the station to eliminate those that may be abusive or irrational, and the host is likely to be helpful if you get a difficult caller.

- You should be able to anticipate many queries. Write out expected questions and your answers before the time of your interview. Since the call-in segment usually follows an interview, it's good to introduce some new information in your responses.
 - On television, body language is important. Don't cling to furniture or cross your arms tightly - you want to convey an air of openness and accessibility. Even if a question is irrelevant, appear to be concerned about what the person has to say. If the same question is asked more than once, patiently answer it again.
 - When someone asks several questions at once, you are free to choose the one you'd like to answer and ignore the others.
 - If the question is one you'd rather not answer directly, use it to lead into a point you do want to make.
 - If you don't know the answer to a question, say so. Cite a possible source of the information or offer to get the information for the questioner.
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Tips for Newspaper Interviews

- Never speak off the record; assume that everything you say will be reported, whether it's before, during, or after an interview.
- Make sure that what you tell the reporter is what you want to see in print. If you are unhappy with the way you have phrased something, stop and rephrase or clarify your original statement. If you realize after the interview that you misstated a fact or phrased something poorly, call the reporter to correct the error.
- A newspaper reporter will not allow you to review copy before it is printed. You can, however, extend your influence over the article by inviting the reporter to call you for more information or clarification.