

# Media Training 101

Here's how to successfully navigate an interview with a reporter.

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So you've been invited (or maybe you've successfully pitched yourself!) to do an interview at your local news station—or paper. Now come the butterflies. Even for communication experts, this can be a nerve-racking experience. Here are some best practices to help get you through it successfully.

## **Before the interview**

If you are self-employed, the details may be fully at your discretion. However, if you work for an employer, you want to make sure you follow appropriate protocol. This varies based on the workplace. If you have a public relations department, let them know about the media request in advance. PR staff may want to vet reasons for the interview first. Also, inform anyone else at work you think needs to know about the request.

Before agreeing to an interview, ask a few questions. This is the time to do it! First, how will you contact the interviewer? If this is for radio or TV, when and for how long will you need to be at the station? If it's for a written story, will the interview be in person or over the phone? Also, get information about the story, such the angle, types of questions they want to ask, the format—taped or live—and who else (if anyone) will appear with you during the interview.

Knowing these details can help you avoid a potentially uncomfortable situation. They can also help determine if the reporter or media outlet has a particular agenda or bias. Remember to ask the reporter about their deadline at the outset to determine if it is even a feasible request.

## **How to prepare**

Even if you have significant expertise on the interview topic, you can still prepare to help the conversation go smoothly:

- **Determine your key messages.** Choose no more than three main points to emphasize and practice talking about them concisely and without jargon. Keep the conversation informative but accessible. You want to educate a broad audience about your expertise. Seek opportunities to repeat your points.
- **Think through any areas of vulnerability.** Is the topic controversial? Is there something in particular you worry the reporter will ask? Consider how you would respond to any potentially tricky questions in advance. It's important not to be defensive during the interview. If you don't feel comfortable or qualified to give an answer, better to pass on the question, calmly and positively: "I understand the interest in this question, but I'm not the best person to answer it."
- **Get advice.** Talk to trusted colleagues and your boss or mentor about the interview. What issues do they think might get covered? How would they answer tough questions?

- **Block time for prep.** Make sure to carve out enough time for preparation well before the interview. On the day of, plan to arrive at the location—or find a quiet spot with good phone reception—a little early so you feel unrushed and relaxed.
- **Familiarize yourself with the reporter and media outlet.** Watch or read a few past interviews from the reporter interviewing you. You should be able to find their past stories on their media outlet’s website. This will give you an idea of their style.
- **Consider your appearance.** Plan your wardrobe. Pick clothing that projects a professional image, but is also comfortable for sitting in a variety of chair heights. Think layers with an easily removable jacket or sweater and nice shirt or blouse underneath in case the studio lights are hot.

## During an interview

- **Be friendly.** Smile. Try your best not to be combative or defensive, even if the reporter asks you some tough questions.
- **Remember your key messages.** Try to bridge back to your main points. You can do this by using such phrases as: “Another important thing to understand,” “related to that,” or “on that topic...”.
- **Avoid using jargon and acronyms, and be succinct.** You can’t assume the public will understand professional terms or acronyms. Tailor your answers accordingly with accessible language. Broadcast media require comparatively brief responses and print stories will want short quotes, so try to be concise.
- **Remember: You’re always “on.”** Keep in mind, even if a camera isn’t rolling and you are engaging in pre- or post-interview chitchat with the reporter, that conversation could be included in a story.
- **Answer the question.** Do your best to respond directly to the question, while bringing in your key messages. Otherwise, the reporter and the audience can get frustrated.

## After an interview

- **Follow up.** If the interview isn’t live or if it’s for a print piece, ask when it’s scheduled to appear and if you can review it beforehand—although reviewing won’t always be an option. Thank the reporter and offer to be a resource in the future. Inform appropriate parties at your job.
- **Be available for post-interview requests.** The reporter may need additional information from you. Try to respond quickly, as they may be on a tight deadline.
- **Publicize your involvement.** Share on your social media accounts, in professional networks—like LinkedIn—and on your website or blog. This is a great way to boost your professional profile.
- **Tell ASHA!** ASHA wants to know about members’ participation in news stories. We can publicize you’re involvement in the “People” section of The ASHA Leader and post the story on ASHA’s social media accounts—and you might get recognized as an ASHA Media Champion. Email us at [pr@asha.org](mailto:pr@asha.org).

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