

Being Memorable

You get one shot. Don't plan on another. So here's what you should do:

- 1 Be yourself and have fun.** Don't segment yourself into the worker person and the real you. The real you will always make a better impression.
- 2 Obsess about accuracy, but let go of precision.** Don't talk about the "process" it took to get there or the exact percentage to the decimal; be accurate but less detailed.
- 3 This is an opportunity, not a moment to be feared.** Either you're in charge, or the other "guy" is in charge. You decide.
- 4 Speak with conviction.** Don't excuse or qualify your point before you make it. Nuance and gray areas can be explained once you've set the stage, but ambiguity leads to doubt.
- 5 Be clear about your message.** What are the two or three points you want the person to learn or remember—not the 20 or 30 points. Test your message with a teenager or a neighbor. Do they get it? Are they "sold"? If not, try again.
- 6 Speak simply and clearly.** Leave your buzzwords and other jargon at home.
- 7 Know your audience.** Think about their perspective—what do they need to hear? What is in it for them? Be as specific as possible when asking them to do something.
- 8 Think action, not process.** A meeting or collaboration isn't an end goal, it's one step in a process. Talk about the ultimate goal when delivering your "ask."
- 9 The messenger is more important than the message.** Both are crucial, but don't underestimate the power of your personality and your delivery. It matters more than the content of what you have to say.
- 10 Tell stories—brief stories.** People are moved by stories and the emotion behind them more than they are by data.
- 11 Your interview or meeting is brief, not a seminar or lecture.** A typical face-to-face meeting, interview or chance encounter runs about 15 minutes – or less. You have about 3 minutes or less to make your point.
- 12 Anticipate tough questions and practice the answers.** You should almost never be caught off guard or surprised. Sometimes the hardest question is "how can I help." Know what you want them to do. Be prepared to make a plan and agree on next steps.

Remember, be yourself and have fun!

Controlling the Interview

Every interview is an opportunity for you to communicate about your work. It's not a moment to be feared. You are the expert. You know what the audience needs to hear and can control where the interview goes. A reporter may have a different agenda than you, but they are not out to "get" you. You both have a shared interest in providing the audience with credible, factual and relevant material.

- **Know your message and keep going back to it.** Before the interview, identify the key message you want to delivery. Use every opportunity to get your message in, and don't be afraid to repeat it.
- **Anticipate potential misinterpretation on the reporter's part.** Understand that sometimes a tough question is based on a lack of understanding. Pre-empt possible these by having clear messages and politely, but firmly, correcting the premise. With good messages, you can helpfully redirect a reporter.
- **Rephrase loaded questions—don't repeat negative words.** Don't get caught repeating negative language. Be decisive and clear if you disagree or if there is something wrong in the question, but reframe your response to be positive. For instance, if a reporter were conducting an interview about a pandemic flu and asked: "So your plan is to isolate the sick and let them die?" A good response would simply be: "No, we will quarantine the sick and get them all the help that is available."
- **Bridge from negative questions to your message.** You can't simply ignore questions, but you can choose how you answer them. Acknowledge difficult questions quickly then bridge to the message that you want to communicate.
- **Be candid—always tell the truth.** Never say "no comment." This only invites suspicion and leads reporters to wonder if you have something to hide. Always answer questions honestly and accurately. And if you genuinely can't or don't think you should comment on something, use one of these responses:
 - "This is what I know, and I'll be glad to tell you..."
 - "I don't know, but I'll be happy to help you find out or refer you to someone who does know."
 - "I cannot answer your question because the information you seek is confidential." (For example, the name of a patient and his or her condition.)
- **Anticipate tough questions and practice the answers.** You should almost never be caught off guard or surprised. Before you go into an interview, think of the questions you would never want to be asked, and prepare answers.
- **Don't argue with reporters.** If a reporter seems to be heading down a path that is inaccurate or misleading, be sure to clarify the precise truth in the proper context.

But try to create a civil environment for the interview. In most cases, the reporter will try to do the same. Don't forget to stick to your message!

- **Don't assume that anything is off the record.** The rules for "off-record" vs "on-record" can be confusing. To be safe, assume that anything you say may be quoted.
- **Suggest additional resources.** It's helpful to suggest that reporters speak with people in addition to you. Recommend well-respected experts who share your view and add credibility to your message. You can also supply the reporter with written background material to support your point of view. This may include a press release, brochure, or fact sheet. This information will increase the likelihood that your view of the situation will be presented accurately.

Three Components of Bridging

Bridging is a technique to help you stay on message during an interview. This is particularly important when a reporter asks a question that is off-topic or difficult to answer, or when you have only a very limited window to get your message across, like during a TV interview.

Here are the three components to successful bridging:

Acknowledge the question.

You may or may not actually answer the question, depending on what it is and how connected it is to your message. But, at a minimum, you should address the question. Be as brief as possible in your acknowledgment.

Find your way back to your message.

Your goal is to get from the initial question to your message as quickly as possible. The key is to find the common theme that connects the question to your message, and transition from acknowledging the question to your message succinctly and smoothly.

You can also use transitional phrases to make the leap:

- What this study really says is ...
- The most important thing to take away from this is...
- Let me put this in context...

Deliver your message.

Don't forget to deliver your message once you've bridged away from the question. Not only are you getting your key message in, you are redirecting the interview. If you've done your job and your message is clear and compelling, the reporter will hopefully find an interesting follow up question to ask rather than returning to the original question.

Remember: The reporter's job is to ask you questions, but your job is to deliver your message!

Bridging Phrases

- “Yes...” (the answer), “and in addition to that...” (the bridge)
- “No...” (the answer), “let me explain...” (the bridge)
- “...but I think what you’re really asking is...”
- “That speaks to a bigger point...”
- “Let me put that in perspective...”
- “What’s important to remember, however...”
- “I don’t work on that issue but I do work on...”
- “The real issue here is...”
- “Let me add...”
- “That’s outside my area of expertise but what I can tell you is...”
- “A more useful way to look at it is...”
- “Yes, but it’s important to emphasize...”
- “That’s not exactly what I meant...”
- “Those were important factors, but...”
- “Perhaps an equally important issue here is...”
- “Here’s what I think the question should be ...”
- “I’m glad you asked me that. People may have that misconception, but the truth is...”

When a Reporter Calls...

...Ask Questions First!

- **Who are you dealing with?** Find out about the reporter, media outlet, and audience. If the media outlet or reporter is unfamiliar to you, Google the name to find out more information about what they cover.
- **What is the story about?** Most reporters won't give you their questions in advance, but they will tell you the broad outline of what they're working on and why they want to talk to you.
- **What's the deadline?** The answer will help you determine how much time you have to prepare for the interview.
- **What type of story is this?** Is the story breaking news or an in-depth feature piece?
- **Who else is the reporter interviewing for the story?** This information may help you better understand the reporter's angle on the story.
- **For radio and TV, is this a live or a taped interview?** Where will the interview take place, and with whom? How long will the interview last? For radio, is this a call-in show?
- **Does your public information officer (PIO) or communications director know about the media call?** Make sure to contact your PIO after you receive a media call or refer the call directly to them. Oftentimes they will know something about the media outlet and can help organize the logistics, as well as handle answering these questions for you.
- **Be sensitive to reporters' deadlines.** The faster you return their call, the more likely you will be the expert who is quoted. If you've arranged to call them back at a certain time, be sure to keep your appointment!

Remember: You have the right to say “no” to an interview request if you are uncomfortable with the reporter or the media outlet that he or she represents.

Interviewee Bill of Rights

You have the right to:

- Know the topic
- Know the format
- Schedule the interview (you don't have to jump into an interview without preparing)
- Clarify misstatements
- Use notes (except for television interviews)
- Record the interview

You do not have the right to:

- Edit the story
- Expect your view to be the only view

What you can ask for, but may not get

- Know the questions in advance
- To change your quotes
- To see the story in advance

Before the interview:

- Do your homework. Get to know the reporter, publication or program, interview format and audience.
- Respect the deadline, and then prepare. When the reporter calls, feel free to ask if you can call them right back. Then take time to prepare your messages.
- Be ready for the tough questions. List all the toughest questions you can imagine, and be prepared to answer them.
- Relax! Take a few deep breaths and have your messages in hand.

Lighting, Positioning and Audio Tips for Skype and Other Webcam Interviews

These tips were compiled and shared by PBS NewsHour.

Positioning

- Put some distance between you and your background. Darker walls/backgrounds are better than lighter/white ones.
- Your computer's camera should be roughly at the same height as your eyes. You don't want to be looking down or up at the camera.
- If you can't change the height of your chair/seat, use books/magazines to raise your computer. Slight angle discrepancies are ok.
- You want to look at the camera when you're talking (at top of screen), not at your image on-screen.

Lighting

- You want more light on your face than on what's behind you. (If it's equal on both, ok, but do not let the background be brighter than your face.)
- Use "soft" light on your face—think of the light on a cloudy day. Not harsh, no strong shadows. To achieve that, use a lamp with a warm/opaque lampshade. If using windows, use a sheer fabric/curtain. If you only have lamps with open/naked bulbs, try bouncing the light off a wall/poster/sheet of paper. (That means directing the light away from you and onto a nearby white/warm surface so it bounces back onto you.)
- If you have only one lamp/light source, ideal location of that light is slightly above the computer's screen, falling down onto your face. (It can be slightly off to one side versus the other.)
- If you have two light sources of equal brightness, put them on either side of computer screen, lighting your face equally from both sides.

Audio

- For the clearest possible sound, be in a quiet space, and try to get your mouth as close to your microphone as possible.
- If you have a tracking mic at home, that'll be the best quality. (If you've got one, you likely know how to use it and connect it to your computer.)
- Apple's AirPods (or other Bluetooth/wireless headphones) are the next best option because the mic is right by your mouth, the earpiece is largely hidden in your ear, and there are no wires.
- Wired in-ear headphones with a phone mic (think of Apple's usual white corded ones) are good, but the cords will be visible. Maybe that's an acceptable trade-off for better mic placement.
- Using your computer's built-in microphone is the least best option, as it's the farthest from your mouth. In a quiet space, it can be just fine. We use this option a lot. In this case, try to get your computer as close to your face as possible, without making the video look awkward. (Moving your face closer to the computer will throw more unflattering blue screen light onto your face, so if that's happening, consider dimming your screen's brightness.)

It's all a balancing act between picture and sound, and the person on the receiving end of your Skype call can help you navigate!

Phone Interviews

You just received a request to do a phone interview. What now? Telephone interviews can be challenging. You are not able to read the cues and body language of the interviewer that you normally would for an in-person interview. As with any interview, prepare by gathering as much information as you can about the interview, format, audience and host, and anticipate tough questions.

Here are also some tips to help manage your experience:

Buy time to prepare

- If the reporter's deadline allows, buy extra time to prepare for the interview by scheduling it at a time that works for both of you and also falls within the deadline. (Even 10-20 minutes is enough to get you ready.)

Create an "interview space"

- If possible, find a place where you will not be distracted and can focus on the messages you are delivering during the interview. Clear your mind and your desk (except for relevant materials), close your door, turn off email, blackberry, television and other things and people who may distract you.
- Don't smoke, chew gum, eat, drink, or provide any distraction that will prevent the reporter from concentrating on the interview itself. Keep a glass of water nearby in case your mouth gets dry.

Use your notes

- The only thing separating you and the reporter is a phone. Use it to your advantage. If it helps, keep your key messages and background materials in front of you to remind you of key points or in case you need to refer to something important.

Take notes

- During the interview, have pen and paper nearby to jot down points you weren't able to make or questions you weren't able to answer so that you can present your case later in the interview or with a follow up call or email.

Be heard

- Literally! Whenever possible, take your interview from a landline phone, where there is a better sound quality. Cell phones can affect the clarity of your sound on the other end because they are susceptible to static, various signal interferences, and dropped calls. Avoid this kind of interruption altogether when you can.

Speak slowly and enunciate

- Words sometimes get lost in translation. It's important to pace yourself. Slow down and articulate your words clearly to avoid any confusion in the point you are making.
- When asked a question, it is perfectly normal to take a couple seconds to collect your thoughts before responding.

Describe and smile

- Without the benefit of face-to-face contact, you will have to conduct the interview in a way that paints a picture for the person on the other end, but more importantly, for the broader audience. You can do this by using imagery, giving examples, and telling stories.
- It also helps to smile while speaking. Smiling tends to lift your tone and makes you sound more pleasant and engaging. And consider standing, instead of sitting, which can give more energy to your voice and help you focus better.

Be personal, but show respect

- Even if you don't know them personally, try to establish a friendly rapport with the journalist (e.g. be natural and find ways to break the ice prior to the interview by discussing commonalities, such as the weather, work interests, sports, etc.) Address them with their title, unless it has been established early on that you are on a first-name basis.
- Don't interrupt the reporter. Give him/her time to ask the question or express his/her thoughts.

Radio Interviews

Radio interviews require the same amount of preparation as any other interview. It is still important to know the show format (e.g. live or taped, listener call-in, etc.), audience, who other guests are, and so on. It's also essential to avoid jargon, know your messages, and use techniques, like bridging, to deliver messages clearly and concisely. But in a radio interview—whether by phone or in-studio—there are other factors that can make or break the experience.

Here are tips to help make it more successful:

Use your voice

- In radio, the listener cannot see your non-verbal gesturing, so your voice has to stand out. Don't speak in monotone. Change your inflection and pitch level to emphasize a point or clarification, and try to be as expressive as possible.
- Be genuine and sincere, and avoid sarcasm. If you are faking it, it tends to be amplified on radio.

Listen carefully

- Radio removes the sense of sight, so it is even more important to heighten your listening skills and know when to add to the discussion, if it isn't already your turn to speak. Listen for pauses that may indicate the right time to interject a thought and take back control of the message.

Visualize

- For some people, it is easier to imagine speaking to an audience in your mind if that helps deliver a better message. For others, it is less stressful to visualize a more intimate conversation with just the interviewer and other guests. Use what works for you!

Keep your composure

- Broadcast interviews (radio and TV) can be unpredictable. It is common for technical glitches to occur. Stay calm until you get a cue from the producer that you are linked up again, and stand ready to repeat your point, if necessary.
- Be prepared for negative and hostile questions and comments from listeners and/or the host. Instead of getting flustered, take the high road by politely making your point and supporting it with facts.