

Media Training 101: How to Interact with the Press

Interview Tips

The following tips serve as a helpful guide as you prepare and conduct interviews with the media on behalf of IEEE.

Preparing for the Interview

- Know the reporter, outlet, interview format and audience.
 - *Do your research: what does the reporter usually write about? What does the publication cover?*
 - *With regards to audience: Think about how much familiarity your audience has with the subject/issue? Tailor your message to your audience, not the interviewer—don't lecture.*
- Be clear on the goal of the interview and the story areas that would be appropriate for you to provide insight on. Make sure you are the correct person to speak to the designated topic/subject area.
- Review your key message points.
- Have your IEEE Key Messaging (link) document handy, for general IEEE information
- Consider the likely questions – both hard and easy – and appropriate answers.

General Interview Tips

- Speak clearly and avoid using too much industry jargon.
- Be engaging and likable.
- Let the interviewer completely finish the question before you start your answer.
- Keep your cool at all times, and don't allow yourself to be provoked.
- If you don't know the answer, don't pretend to be an authority – offer to follow up after the interview with the correct response. This will help you increase credibility with the reporter and also helps create better rapport.
- Never lie to a reporter.

Achieving Your Goals

- Speak in “soundbites.”
 - Speak in concise, easy-to-quote sentences.
 - Offer the conclusion first, and then back it up with facts, evidence and research.
- Don't over answer, and avoid telling the reporter *everything* you know on the subject.
- Make sure your response to a question is both an answer plus a message you want to deliver. “Bridging” to a related point you want to make is one effective technique (more information on bridging is listed below).
- Asked about a problem? Explain and offer a possible solution.
- Asked to speculate on an issue? Avoid answering speculative questions: respond by saying something like “I'm unable to comment on that, but I can tell you about...” and steer the conversation back into your area of expertise.
- Don't let false charges, facts or figures – offered by a reporter – stand uncorrected, but try to offer a correction without insulting the reporter. If appropriate, offer additional sources of information to support your statements.

- Don't repeat a reporter's negative statements. Frame your reply as a positive response.
- Don't fall victim to hypothetical situations. Focus your conversation on facts and make sure any predictions you make are backed by data or general industry knowledge.

Conducting the Interview

- Establish an "interview atmosphere" – or mindset for yourself.
- Avoid multitasking during the interview, so that you're giving your full attention to the reporter. It can be helpful to even turn off your computer screen or go in a different room.
- Don't be afraid to use your notes on phone interviews. It's best to have bulleted points that you'd like to emphasize, so you avoid reading directly off of your notes during the whole call.
- Personalize your message whenever possible. Audiences relate to the personal, and making what may be an abstract issue "real" for them can be extremely effective.
- On messaging: conceptualize one strong key message and convey it at every opportunity during the interview.
- Be animated—your energy level will indicate your enthusiasm about an issue. Remember to be likable, show your concern and don't be afraid to show some emotion, when appropriate.
- Steer the direction of the interview at every opportunity—respond, and then go back to your message. With practice, this can be done without seeming evasive. The trick is to adequately respond—and then move on to the salient message point.

Blocking and Bridging

Use transitions, or 'bridges,' to make your point:

- "That reminds me..."
- "Let's look at the issue in a wider context..."
- "Let me put that into perspective..."
- "Another more important issue is..."
- "I'm glad you asked me that..."
- "Let me just add..."

Block question and bridge back to your key messages; don't entertain questions outside your area of expertise or outside agreed upon areas of disclosure.

- "I'm not the right person to answer that, but I can tell you..."
- "I don't have that information on hand, but what I do know is..."