



## The Media Interview

**Unless you are 100% on top of an issue or area avoid doing on-the-spot interviews.**

**Don't ever try and wing it - the risks are too great - unless you have a good relationship with the journalist and trust them.**

**Always arrange to do the interview at a later time to give yourself time to think about the answer.**

### **Always ask the journalist or reporter**

- What's the angle?
- What's your story about?
- What sorts of questions do you want to ask?
- Who else are you speaking to or interviewing for this story?

### **Know your stuff, do your research, consult others**

- Do your research
- Know what's already been said – politicians and stakeholders
- Contact other people with specialist knowledge of the topic or issue

### **Positioning**

How will this interview position my organisation in this space and more generally in public debate and perception? What will we get out of it?

- Raise awareness of our work in this space – the good work that we're doing
- Opportunity to criticise the government – over a failure or inadequacy
- To highlight problem area and inadequacy needing attention
- Raise public awareness of an issue – change perception - mobilise action

***Will doing this interview help or hinder my organisations cause?***

### **Risks**

- Perpetuate negative perception of the issue or cause
- Ongoing funding
- Harm ongoing relations – with decision makers; others in the field; or in the community
- Harm perception and/or standing of yourself and your organisation



Doing an interview is a great opportunity to have your voice heard, publicise your work or issues you are working on; raise public awareness; and pressure for government action but:

***Be clear on why you are doing it and what you want to get out of doing this particular interview.***

### **What the media wants**

Generally speaking journalists and media outlets are looking for:

- Critical' reaction (REAX)
- Fresh angle to a story or issue
- Expose - breaking news story
- Real life stories that bring attention to an issue or policy/program success or failure

**Example:** Budget or Government announcement

Government delivers – Opposition and other political players comment

Stakeholder groups REAX

Real Life People – to illustrate impact of particular policy decisions

Violence and crime – what's happening, who's to blame, and what should be done about it?

### **Key Messages**

Think about and jot down the key points you want to make –this will vary depending on the length of the interview and whether it's for press, radio, or television.

- Aim for between 1 and 3 key points
- How will I make these points – how can I best express what I want to say?
- How will it come across?
- And is that good / constructive for what I want to achieve with this interview?

### **Personalising the experience**

Revealing some personal attachment to the issue/story or a concrete example is POWERFUL. It builds rapport with interviewer and audience; makes you more credible; and makes the issue real for people – even if they don't agree with you.



#### **EXAMPLE:**

Reveal something personal – ie adopted you were adopted when talking about adoption  
Recall a real life story from the field (make sure you have permission to tell the story)

Concrete example from your work - someone's personal experience that is moving or powerful

Journalists and radio programs are always looking for these stories and real people to tell them stories that highlight an issue, an area that needs increased awareness of, or community or government action.

#### **Anticipate difficult or unexpected questions**

Always be aware of what the Government's stated response is or anticipate what it's likely to be because that's what the journalist will likely come back with – if you are clear on that it's another opportunity to restate your key message on the issue.

Know what others in the space are saying because if there are different viewpoints being expressed, journalists are likely to put those other perspectives to you – be prepared.

Asking the journalist those simple questions before you conduct the interview will help you prepare for this: What's the angle? What's your story about? What sorts of questions do you want to ask? Who else are you speaking to or interviewing for this story?

Some journalists will have a different philosophical or political view to you and go hard – ie commercial shock jocks – know who the interviewer is and what views they've expressed in this area to help you prepare your comeback lines – keep your cool and stay on message!



## The Press Interview

Be clear about whether the interview is on the record or as background for a story that a journalist is working on.

On the record means everything you say can be published

Be clear on what is on the record and what is not

Gain the confidence of the journalist by being warm and friendly and knowing your stuff – they should respect that you know what you are talking about in this area - otherwise they would not have come to you for an interview.

Know your stuff and express it simply and succinctly

If you are unsure about something you've said or have made a mistake call the journalist back before the publishing deadline to correct (usually round 5-6pm for newspapers)

If you have been misrepresented in the published version contact the journalist and explain – ask for a correction. If you are clearly in the right the journalist and media outlet will usually publish a correction – but don't expect it to be on page 1!

### Complaints: Australian Press Council

- If a correction is refused you can complain in writing to the Australian Press Council, which is responsible for promoting good standards of media practice.
- The Press Council is the principal body with responsibility for responding to complaints about Australian newspapers, magazines and associated digital outlets.
- For further details about how to make a complaint, how complaints are handled and the outcomes of complaints: <http://www.presscouncil.org.au/>
- The other option is Media Watch on ABC: <http://www.abc.net.au/mediawatch/>



## The Radio Interview

### News grabs

- An interview for radio news stories are generally short (5 – 10 minutes) and pre-recorded.
- Grabs are usually between 15-24 seconds long – that's one short paragraph or statement.
- Come up with your strongest statement that captures exactly what you want to say on the issue – and say it clearly and strongly during the course of the interview.
- Try and say it with a pause (breath) before and after to make it easier for the journalist to cut-edit for radio.
- If you are unhappy with how you delivered it or stumbled, come back to repeat it later in the interview.
- You can also repeat it in the interview (no more than twice) – to increase your chance that the journalist will use it.
- Generally come up with three strong lines on different aspects of the story and use them during the interview.
- This will ensure the journalist uses one of them – and they might even use two or all three of them for separate stories for subsequent news bulletins with different angles that keeps the story going.
- Don't read answers - write it down and practise it a few times
- If you have made a mistake or stumble – you can always correct yourself or say sorry 'I'll say that again' ... pause ... and then start it again.

### Radio Program

Most radio program interviews are between 4 - 8 minutes depending on the issue and/or the quality of the talent.

- Always prepare and ask producer/presenter those key questions before the interview
- Do your research, know what's been said and what other stakeholders are saying, and if need be consult others
- Aim to make up to three key points in an interview (1-3)
- Write these down so you are clear on the key points you want to make – and practise
- Use clear simple language



### Personalise / humanise the experience

- Giving a concrete example either from your own direct experience or someone else's is a strong way to connect the interviewer, listener and audience with the issue – it is powerful.
- Take your key messages and think about how you could weave in a real life experience to illustrate this.
- How is it affecting or impacting on the people you work with – give an example.
- This makes you more credible and makes people listen even if they don't agree.

### Interrupting

You can interrupt but the way you do it is important. Try and find a natural pause. If not, say something like:

- 'Actually, Can I say 'Julia' ...
- 'Well, if I could just respond to that 'Julia'

## Presentation Tips

### Voice, tone and delivery of your message

- Remember to take deep breaths leading up to the interview – find your centre – breath from your centre/gut not chest – takes a few minutes – this will relax you.
- Be warm, friendly, courteous, and respectful
- Authoritative – know your stuff and be an expert in what you are talking about - because of your position and experience in the area – and do it with warmth.
- No arrogance, I told you so, moralising, preaching, or I know best type of attitude.
- Don't get flustered or show that you are personally affronted by questions or opinions expressed by the interviewer or other panellists by raising your voice or losing your warmth and centre. Keep your grace, stay measured.
- Some people raise their voice, net narky, or show anger.
- This is a sign that they have lost their centre and will be noticed as a weakness – take your power by staying measured and centred.
- Be succinct in your responses – get to the point – get to key messages.
- Stay on track with our key messages
- Sell our message and cause with grace and subtlety
- Watch out for high pitch – some people can tend to go high – if you notice you're doing this, work more on your breathing and find your centre



### 'Bridging'

"Bridging" creates a transition so that you can move from one subject to the message you want to communicate.

First answer the direct question, then transition to your message.

#### **Some ways to bridges:**

"Let's put your question into perspective ...

"The real issue here is....

"It's important to remember that..."

"I can't tell you that, but what I can tell you is ...

Avoid using any of these more than once

#### **Microphone Techniques**

- If you are doing the interview in the studio make yourself comfortable in the chair and keep roughly a hands width away from the microphone to prevent popping.
- Don't waver from the microphone
- If you laugh or cough, move back from the microphone
- Look directly at the presenter/interview as you speak to engage them
- If you are doing an interview on the telephone try not to breath all over the mouth piece as it will sound muffled – move slightly back from it for clarity and atmosphere – the presenter can always lower or increase your volume in the studio
- Avoid noising background or echoey room or building



## Television / Video Interviews

### Going on Stage – deep breaths

Remember to take deep breaths – find your centre – breath from your centre/gut not chest – this takes a few minutes – this will relax you.

### Body Language

- Get comfortable, sit upright and leaning forward when you talk, no leaning to any side or slouching - be conscious of your body language.
- Establish rapport with audience by facing / looking / talking to the audience once you've acknowledged the presenter or questioner.

### Voice

- Smile and have warmth in your voice
- Be authoritative and an expert in our area of work - but with warmth
- Watch out for high pitch – if you notice you're doing this, work more on your breathing and find your centre.

### Tone and speed

- Be conscious of your speed – be measured in your delivery and pick out main points you want to make each time you're going to talk – you won't be able to say everything you want in answering a question.
- Be succinct in your responses -get to the point-get our key messages out on the topics.
- Communicate confidence – an authority in this area.
- Keep It Short and Simple

### Stay on Message

- Each time you speak you should get out at least 1 and up to 3 of our key messages out on topics related to our field.
- Stay on track with our key messages
- Sell our message and cause with grace and subtlety
- Use your natural abilities to their fullest
- Using the proper body language, natural gestures, varying the tone and pitch of your voice and waving a flag over your most important points are crucial

### Have fun!

Laughing at something funny that is said or happens is a good way to relax you and show your human side – that you're not all serious.

If you come up with something funny to say at any point during the program (if longer program) I encourage you to say it – obviously think about how you're going to say it first.

*Enjoy the experience - have fun!*



## How to write a media release

A media release is the most effective way of providing information to media outlets about your event, issue or program. Its purpose is to gain the interest of the media outlet, and provide them with the angle of how to position the story.

### Media release angle

The angle – sometimes called the ‘hook’ – is what captures the interest of the media. Some angles typically covered by the media include:

- publication of research or reports
- launch of new services, resources, programs or initiatives
- announcement of new policies, initiatives, strategies
- performance milestone or achievement
- announcement about a new conference, forum, workshop, or awards
- reaction to story in the news

A strong angle includes the following elements:

**Who** Who was involved?

**Where** Where did it take place?

**What** What happened?

**Why** Why did it happen?

**When** When did it take place?

Make sure you’ve thought about it from the media’s point of view – while an issue is important to you, you need to ensure you’ve made it important to journalists and their audience, increasing your chances of coverage. Ensure your media release emphasises what’s ‘new’, otherwise it won’t be classified as news.

A media release should include no more than three ‘key messages’. A key message is a point you want to get across to the media and general public. Any more than three is difficult to convey and remember.



## Media release structure

- The headline should be short and snappy to grab attention. It should include key words from your release and sum up its subject.
- The first paragraph is called 'the lead'. It is the most important part of the release and should contain the strongest key message. This paragraph should also give the who, what, when, where, and why of the story.
- Editors may not read beyond the first paragraph, so it is important that it contains all the necessary and relevant information.
- After the lead, each remaining paragraph should be less important than the one that precedes it. When written this way, the story can, if necessary, be trimmed from the bottom up, paragraph by paragraph.
- Each paragraph is self-contained and regardless of how many paragraphs are deleted, the story should still make complete sense. This style is intended primarily for newspapers and magazines.
- Include quotes from spokespeople which consolidate the key messages. As quotes are often used by media, ensure you use these to communicate key messages rather than background information.

## Media release format

- Keep your media release to one page (maximum 400 words). The aim is to encourage a reporter to pursue your story, not to overwhelm them with detail.
- Include the date at the top of the media release.
- If the media release is to be available immediately, include the words 'For Immediate Release'.
- If you'd like to send out a media release in advance, include the word 'Embargoed' and the future date of release, for example – 'Embargoed until 1 January 2020'. An 'embargo' is often used to let media know about an upcoming event so they can allocate staff and space in a publication.



- Include contact details (name, email, phone number) at the bottom of the release, and make sure a spokesperson is available to comment and is familiar with the release.
- If the release includes details of an event, provide a street directory reference as well as the address.

#### **Media release writing tips**

- Write in the present tense.
- Keep it simple, to the point, and factual.
- Avoid using long words – short, plain English is best.
- Avoid jargon and acronyms (for example, phams or pdrs). A general audience is unlikely to familiar with specialist terms, so it is best not to use them.
- Avoid adjectives, and passive phrases such as ‘I think’ or ‘I believe’.
- Consider including facts or statistics which give context to the issue.
- Be accurate with all information you provide such as names, job titles, times, dates and all facts.
- If including numbers, be sure to keep them simple (for example, ‘over one million’ rather than ‘1,000,536’) or make them meaningful to the reader (for example, ‘enough water to fill 6 Olympic swimming pools’ rather than ‘15,000,000 litres of water’).
- Ask someone else to read the release before it is distributed and remember, spell check is your friend!

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