

Quick Tips for Preparing for an Interview

- We need to do it right the first time ... there are no media rebuttals.
- Don't assume the reporter has the background to understand the issues. Deliver your message in a clear and orderly fashion.
- Plan to make only two or three key points. Too much information makes a reporter have to decide which facts to use and which not to use – and she may not pick the ones you'd prefer. The story doesn't get longer because more information is supplied ... only less focused.
- If you can't say your points in a simple clear sentence, you're not ready for the interview. Keep practicing.
- Get your messages into the interview up front. Don't wait to be asked a specific question. You should have your own agenda that you must get across, and it may be different from the reporter's. Don't let that stop you.
- Keep your answers short and make your point (sound bite) first, then elaborate briefly.
- Don't be intimidated – correct or challenge a reporter's incorrect facts and don't respond to facts/surveys that you are not familiar with. A reporter often knows very little about your area of expertise – he covers a dozen separate topics a day and he won't be insulted if you correct him.
- Do not repeat the reporter's negative language – start your answer from your beginning. (i.e., did you stop beating your wife yet?)
- Use the same point (sound bite) for as many questions as it fits. The reporter will only use a few questions, not the entire interview.
- Treat each question as though it's the only one that will be included in the story. Don't make reference to earlier questions, i.e. "Like I said earlier," verbally label your points, "first," "second," etc., or say other things that would eliminate the stand-alone use of the answer.
- Never speculate. If you find yourself saying "I think" or "I suppose," you need to stop. You are not a fortuneteller, and your job is to stick to the hard facts.

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- Stop any answer midstream if you stumble. Trying to recover on-the-fly only results in a bad answer. So don't finish – just stop and ask the reporter to ask the question again.
- There is no such thing as “off the record.” Assume everything you say will be in tomorrow's headlines. Anything you say out loud is fair game. If you would not like for your mother or your boss to hear you say it on the 6 o'clock news, don't say it at all.
- Dead air time is the reporter's problem, not yours. Use the time to think – or when you're finished, stop talking. The “mike-in-the-face” is a reporter's trick to keep you talking.
- Pause between points. This gives TV editors space to cut your remarks – and it makes you appear thoughtful and sincere.
- Don't ever give personal opinions or talk specifics about the competition. If a reporter wants to know something about another company, he can call them.
- Never say “No Comment.” There is absolutely nothing wrong with saying “I don't know.” The reporter will not use it and will not expect you to know everything.
- Think of reporters like small children. They have had a hectic day, they are impatient, and they want what they want, the way they want it, right now. They just need you to make their job easy – by giving clear sound bites and making your point concisely in layman's terms. Beyond that, you have the power to control the interview.
- Cleanse your vocabulary of meaningless fillers like “Basically” and “Um.” They just mark time while you think of what you want to say – do your thinking silently instead.
- Remember: you are not under subpoena. You have granted the interview – you're doing the reporter a favor. No one can make you say anything except for you.

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