

Media Interviews

HPAM 7600
Thanks to Don Rubin and colleagues
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Increasing Public Interest in Health

- Newspapers have special health sections
- TV stations have added health programming
- Accessing health info is one of the most common reasons why people use blogs and discussion lists (“new media”)

Who would want to interview you?

- Reporters often want to talk to the field worker or researcher
- If you work for a big organization, like the CDC, they will have an office to write-up press releases, but you may still be interviewed
- If you work for a small organization, like a public health office, then you will have to do a lot of the media relations

A reporter wants an interview

- It's a good thing – they are interested in your story
- Establish rapport and ask for time:
 - Ask them about their interest so you know where they are coming from
 - Ask them for time to prepare, then call back
 - Ask them for a sample of questions.
 - Don't be too friendly and say something you don't want to see in print

Prepare for the interview

- Decide if you want to grant the interview:
 - What does the reporter want to talk about?
 - Are you the appropriate person to answer questions on this topic?
 - What medium does the reporter work for?
 - What is the format of the interview? Nightly news? Feature story? Will the interview be taped? Will you be on camera live?
 - Where will the interview be conducted? How long will it take?
 - What is the reporter's deadline?
 - Are there any potential public relations liabilities to such an interview?

Prepare for the interview

- Plan:
 - Figure out what you want to accomplish in with this interview
 - Do you want to:
 - Inform the public?
 - Tell your side of a story?
 - Give good news about what your organization is doing?
 - Don't just give interviews to get exposure, you should have an outcome in mind.

Prepare for the interview

- Research:
 - Look at the reporter's past coverage of similar stories.
 - Decide if you are the right person for the interview.
 - Gather relevant sources you think you'll need
 - Dates and times
 - Names of the people involved
 - Your objective
 - Locations
 - Statistics
 - Quotes from experts
 - Any pictures and graphics (provide them if you can)
 - Contact information

Prepare for the interview

- Prepare three to five key points you want to make
 - Have these key points in large font in front of you during the interview.
 - Refer to these key points so you don't get off track.
 - Generate key words that reflect these key points.
 - Use key words and key points whenever relevant.

Prepare for the Interview


How do I come up with these key points?

- What is the issue?
- What is your involvement in the issue?
- Why is it important?
- What is the historical perspective?

CDC's sohco

Single overriding health communication objective:

- One sentence that sums up most important aspect of what is being communicated
- Follow-up statements that support or qualify that sentence

 Office of Communication/Media Relations
MMWR SOHCO

In one paragraph, please state the key point or objective of your MMWR submission. This statement should reflect what you, the writer, would like to see as the lead paragraph in a newspaper story or in a broadcast news report about your submission.

List three facts or statistics you would like the public to remember as a result of reading or hearing about your article?

What is the main audience or population segment you would like this article to reach?

| | |
|---------|-----------|
| Primary | Secondary |
|---------|-----------|

What is the one message the audience needs to take from this article?

Who in your office will serve as the point-of-contact for media questions?

Name: _____ Degree(s): _____ Phone: _____
 Title: _____ Division/Center: _____
 Date and time available: _____

Note: Please e-mail submissions to CDC at mmwr@cdc.gov. MMWR SOHCO and all other MMWR SOHCO are released to the media every Thursday morning prior to the every Friday's formal release of the MMWR. Please return this completed form via e-mail no later than COB Monday (the week of publication) to: sohco@cdc.gov

Prepare for the Interview

- Prepare some specific responses:
 - Prepare answers to sample questions, if available.
 - Do a mock interview
 - Practice giving answers in 20 seconds
 - Prepare a couple of sound bites or good quotes that address things you particularly want to highlight
 - Prepare some interesting examples or statistics
 - Try to think of an analogy if any points are very complicated or abstract

Prepare for the Interview

- Anticipate tough questions and prepare your answers.
 - List the ten most difficult questions you might be asked regarding the interview topic
- And
- The ten most difficult questions in general
 - Think about how you will transition from answering these questions into a key point you want to make.

Potential Questions During Emergency Situations

- What is your name and title?
- What happened or, what is happening?
- What measures are being taken?
- Has this ever happened before?
- Who is involved?
- Is anyone to blame?
- Is there danger now?
- Do you accept responsibility?
- How much will this cost?
- Was anyone hurt or killed? What are their names?
- How much damage was caused?
- When will we find out more?
- What can private citizens do to help?

Interview Tips

- An interview is not a conversation.
 - Don't take it lightly, make too many jokes, or get off topic.
- There's no such thing as off the record.
 - If you don't want to see it in print, don't say it.
- Tell the truth
 - If you don't, someone will find out and your credibility will be shot.
- Be aware of reporters' deadlines.
 - If you take too long, you may miss your chance.
- Be aware that you may be tape recorded.

Interview Tips

- Listen to the question carefully.
 - Make sure you know what they're asking before you answer.
- Don't rush yourself.
 - Thoughtful answers take time. If you need a moment to think, take one.
- Speak at a normal pace.
 - Don't speak too slow or too quick.
- Keep it simple.
 - Don't use too much jargon, too many examples or long explanations.
 - Keep your sentences short, your introduction brief and to the point, and your approach straightforward.

Interview Tips

- It is okay to rephrase the question.
 - Sometimes questions don't address the big issue or have some mischaracterizations.
- It is okay to repeat an answer.
 - Repetition is a good thing. Reinforce your point. Just try not to sound like a broken record.
- Everything you say will not be printed.
 - Sometimes reporters take different angles.
- Some of what you say may not be accurately printed.
 - That's why it's important for you to stay on message to reduce confusion.

Interview Tips

- Dress appropriately.
- It is okay to ask the reporter to repeat questions.
 - Don't be afraid of sounding ignorant.
- Never answer rudeness with rudeness.
- Before wrapping the interview, make sure you made your point clear.
 - Recap with the interviewer if necessary.
- Stay relaxed and be yourself while watching what you say.
- If you cite names, occupations and addresses, get them right.

Interview Tips

- If you don't know the answer to a question, just admit it and offer to find it out.
- Steer clear from stereotypes and biases
 - Being offensive is rarely effective.
- Make sure you speak loudly and clearly.
- Be aware that your personal space may be compromised.
 - Don't back away from the reporter, microphone or camera.
- Gestures are okay – but don't be twitchy.

Interview Tips

Here's an easy outline to remember:

- First Sentence- Make a statement that answers the reporter's question as briefly as possible.
- Second Sentence- Support your answer.
- Third Sentence- Transition into your message.
- Fourth Sentence- State your message.

Television Interview Tips

- **Sitting:**
 - Sit up straight. Don't swivel or rock.
 - Cross your legs at the knees or sit with your legs at a 45 degree angle in the chair, legs crossed at ankles or feet together, one in front of the other.
 - [Try to look natural.](#)
 - In the television studio, do not jump out of your seat too quickly. The show's credits may be rolling over the scene of you sitting on the set. Consider yourself on camera until the show's director says you are finished.
 - Do not lean on the arm rest of the chair, you look too casual. Lean forward a little, showing interest, not back, showing fear or indifference.

Television Interview Tips

• **Standing:**

- Stand up straight. Beware of slouching and tilted shoulders. Don't rock forward and back or sway side to side.
- Keep your hands at your sides or bend your elbows slightly at your waist. Do not put your hands in your pockets, do not hold them in front of you and do not cross your arms over your chest.
- If you are uncomfortable with your hands at your sides, try holding a notebook or other "prop."

Television Interview Tips

• **Head:**

- Hold your head high. Do not tilt it to one side.
- Beware of being an "active listener" and nodding in apparent agreement to comments with which you may not agree.

Television Interview Tips

• **Eyes:**

- TV cameras get much closer to your face than most people, so your eye movement is critical.
- Do not look at the camera. Look at the reporter 100 percent of the time.
- Focus on the bridge of their nose if you are uncomfortable looking into their eyes continuously.
- Pay attention to what's happening or you may be embarrassed when the camera catches your eyes wandering.
- Do not look up at the ceiling or down at the floor.
- Don't shift your eyes from side to side.

Television / Radio Interview Tips

• **Voice:**

- A sound engineer will ask you to give a voice level, use this opportunity to "set the stage" for the interview with your voice's normal speaking level.
- Beware of leaning toward and away from a stationary microphone while you are talking, as this causes your voice to become louder and softer.
- In a radio interview, your voice is all you have, so beware of speaking in a dull monotone. Project, be expressive, and you will come across better.
- Voices sound best if they are from the lower register, yet they often get higher when people are nervous. You can lower your voice through awareness and controlled, deep breathing.

Television Interview Tips

• **Clothing:**

- Wear clothes that are comfortable, but nice.
- Solid colors or soft shades are best. A light blue shirt or blouse, burgundy tie or scarf and navy jacket is ideal for television.
- Make sure socks that are long enough to avoid a gap between your pant leg and the top of your sock.
- Button a jacket when standing; unbutton when seated.
- Do not wear high contrasts like black and white. Avoid horizontal stripes, hounds-tooth and other distracting patterns. Patterns such as these can look distorted on camera.

Television Interview Tips

• **Stress:**

- Be aware of how you show stress and control it.
- Don't allow nervous gestures, such as pulling at your hair, swinging your foot or smiling too broadly, spoil an otherwise successful interview.
- Nervousness vanishes with frequency. The more interviews you give, the easier they will be.

Telephone Interview Tips

- Know who is on the other end of the line.
- Ask whether you are being recorded.
- Ask when and where the information will be used.
- Spell out difficult names and technical terms and phrases.
- Limit the time available for the interview.
- Be certain to ask for feedback from reporters to ensure that they have understood your points.

Radio Interview Tips

- A live interview is very different from a taped interview.
- Watch out for verbal pauses: um, uh and you know.
- Radio will not be as in-depth as print.
- Be careful not to repeat the negatives in a reporter’s question.

Answering difficult questions

Suggested Transitions

- What I think you are really asking is . . .
- The overall issue is. . .
- What’s important to remember is . . .
- It’s our policy not to discuss x, but what I can say is . . .

Ten Rules for a Successful Interview

1. Be yourself.
2. Know your message.
3. Stick to your expertise.
4. Don't be afraid to say I don't know.
5. Avoid jargon, acronyms, and statistics.
6. Be brief and to the point.
7. Personalize your answers.
8. Never repeat or introduce a negative.
9. Answer questions with:
 - A conclusion
 - An explanation/transition
 - Your core message
10. Maintain eye contact

What to do when...

- The interviewer expects you to comment on issues beyond your expertise.
 - Inform the interviewer that you are only prepared to answer questions related to your expertise as a spokesperson.
 - Transition into key message points.
 - If the interviewer persists, say 'I'm sorry; I'm unable to answer your question.'
 - Stick to the substance of your message.

What to do when...

- The interviewer is unprepared and asks irrelevant question.
 - Take control by reaffirming your expertise.
 - Stress your key message points, feeding him questions about your topic.
 - Involve the interviewer by asking questions about his experiences and concerns.

What to do when...

- The interviewer/guest keeps interrupting you in mid-sentence.
 - When it happens again, say 'I will be happy to respond to your comment, but first let me finish with mine.'
 - Be pleasant, but insist on your right to give complete responses.
 - Do not interrupt a questioner!

What to do when...

- The interviewer is particularly antagonistic and asks one hostile question after another.
 - Do not become combative. Maintain your enthusiasm.
 - Do not repeat a negative question.
 - Remember, you are well prepared and rehearsed.
 - Answer questions with a brief response, then transition to a key message.

What to do when...

- During a taped interview, the reporter keeps raising his voice higher and higher.
 - Don't respond by raising your voice.
 - Each time the reporter raises his voice, lower yours.
 - Remain calm, and stick to your message.

What to do when...

- A reporter puts down his microphone and says, "Let's go off the record."
 - Never go off the record with a reporter.
 - Assume that anything you say in the presence of a reporter will be quoted.
 - Assume that anything you say in the presence of a reporter's equipment will be quoted.

What to do when...

- You're misquoted.
 - If your edited quote captures the gist of what you said, let it go.
 - However, if what you read doesn't sound like you, or was flat-out fabricated, you should take action right away and restate your initiative's real intentions and ideas; options include:
 - Send a request for a correction on the next issues
 - Write a letter to the editor
 - Write a column explaining that what was attributed to you doesn't reflect your actual views
 - Treat everyone with respect; apologize for whatever is your fault.

After the Interview

- Thank the reporter or his/her time and offer to answer questions that may come up later.
- Offer to be available so the reporter can double check your quotes with you.
- If you don't like what a reporter wrote about your organization, keep it to yourself unless you can back up a contrary opinion with fact.
- If a reporter misrepresents the facts, ask for a correction in print or on the air.

Example clip

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8CNKLcfCquA>

Interview Assignment

- Pair up with someone in the class
- Trade news releases (or other write-up)
- Prepare to interview partner by writing questions
- Prepare to be interviewed on chosen topic
- Meet to interview each other (5 min max)
- Video or sound record your interviews if you want participation credit to show in class
- Fill out critique and turn in
