

How to....Give a Great Interview

So you've thought out your media work, made your contacts, crafted your amazing press release and the interest is flooding in. It is likely (and very good news!) that local or regional radio and TV may want to interview you to put a face to the story and make your coverage as interesting as possible for their audiences. Although this may feel daunting, with a bit of preparation your confidence will grow and you'll get great coverage.

So, what's involved?

There are two types of interview for TV and radio....recorded and live. The good news is recorded interviews are by far the most common. Although they may interview you for longer, they will only use very short pieces – for TV the clip they use could be as short as 10-20 seconds, for radio you may get up to three minutes for the complete interview.

Interviews can take place either in a studio or outside – this will depend on the story and the amount of time/resources the radio or TV station can put towards getting the interview. If your interview is in a studio you may find yourself talking directly with your interviewer or you could be stuck in a room by yourself talking into a camera/microphone and have to do the interview 'down the line'. If you are interviewed for TV outside of a studio, there will usually be two people involved, a camera operator and a reporter.

For newspaper interviews, if they want more than the press release, you will be interviewed face-to-face or over the phone before the journalist writes it up for a feature or news article.

Preparing for an interview

Have a think in advance about who your audience is – find out when the interview will be going out and therefore who may be watching/listening/reading.

When you are asked to give an interview, get as much background information as possible by asking the following questions:

- What is the subject? (Ask for an outline and main questions/topics the interview will cover)
- How long will the interview be?
- Will it be a live or recorded interview?
- How will the material be used (e.g. short clip or a longer feature)?
- Is it a one to one interview or a group discussion? If it's a group discussion who else is involved and what are they likely to say?

Prepare and practice

- Write down your 3 key messages – the 3 most important things you really want to get across.
- Anticipate difficult questions. Write down the arguments that might be made against your points and prepare answers. Aren't you just anti-science? Isn't climate change just a theory? Think of answers that help you make your point
- Be prepared for obvious questions: Who are Friends of the Earth? What is climate change? How many people signed your petition? Why are you here?
- Practise out loud in front of a mirror, into a tape recorder/video camera, or to a friend - it will really help you feel prepared and have more confidence.

Tips for interview success

- Remember to say your 3 key messages! Remember the interview will only be short so you need to get your key points over as early as possible – when you are asked a question try to work any answer back to the key points you want to make.
- Try not to fidget, sway or rock from foot to foot – it can make you look unconfident or shifty.
- Eccentricities of dress or behaviour will distract the viewer. If your clothes are understated and tidy then people will concentrate on what you have to say and not what you are wearing.

- Silence can be a trick – don't let it tempt you to go on talking when you have finished making your point.
- Do not use jargon or too many facts and figures. Use simple words to paint a picture and express feeling. You are a campaigner because you care about the issues. You can be well informed but make sure your passion and enthusiasm comes across too.
- Connect with the listener - identify local examples and real life situations to refer to.
- Don't lecture the listener, viewer or reader how to live their life...sell the benefits of what you are campaigning for.
- If you don't know the answer to something say so, don't pretend – get back round to your key point by saying 'I'm not sure about that but what I am certain about is blah...
- Never, ever lie!
- Never lose your temper or get angry – stay calm, cool and collected. This is the best way to win the argument.
- Represent your organisation and campaign – don't forget to mention Friends of the Earth and the name the campaign – its important people know who to go to if they are inspired by your interview!
- When you talk to a journalist anything you say can be quoted – nothing is ever 'off the record'.
- If you are doing a radio interview over the phone, it's really important to ensure you are in an area that is quiet and free from interruptions so you can concentrate, not feel self-conscious and avoid noise interference on the recording. Make sure your phone is switched off as friends may hear you on the radio and call straight away!
- In TV interviews look at and talk to the reporter, NOT the camera. If eye contact makes you nervous, fix your gaze a couple of inches over the interviewer's head.
- If you stumble with your answer in a RECORDED interview, stop and ask for the question to be put to you again.
- If being interviewed for TV with a cameraman/journalist, while the camera operator is setting up the equipment, ask the reporter any questions you have. During the interview, look at and talk to the reporter, NOT the camera. If eye contact makes you nervous, fix your gaze a couple of inches over the interviewer's head.

After the interview

Congratulate yourself! Don't give yourself a hard time if it wasn't perfect. It's never a bad idea to thank the journalist for the interview either - it sounds a bit cheesy but will be appreciated. The only other thing is, if possible, have a think about possible reactions to the interview and prepare yourself for any follow up work you may want to do.