

# How to: give a great media interview



**Friends of  
the Earth**

You've worked out your media plan, made your contacts, crafted an amazing press release and now interest is flooding in. Local or regional radio and TV may want to interview you to put a face to the story and make it interesting for their audiences. This can be daunting, but here Communications and Media Officer **Tori Ray** explains how preparation will build your confidence and help you get great coverage.

## **So, what's involved?**

There are two types of TV and radio interview; pre-recorded and live. The good news is that recorded interviews are by far the most common. Although they may take longer, only very short pieces will be used: a TV clip could be as short as 10 to 20 seconds; or up to three minutes for radio.

Interviews can take place either in a studio or outside – this will depend on the story and the amount of time and resources the radio or TV station has available. If your interview is in a studio you may find yourself talking directly with your interviewer or you could be in a room by yourself talking into a camera or microphone, which is known as doing an interview 'down the line'. If you are filmed for TV outside of a studio, there will usually be two people involved, a camera operator and a reporter.

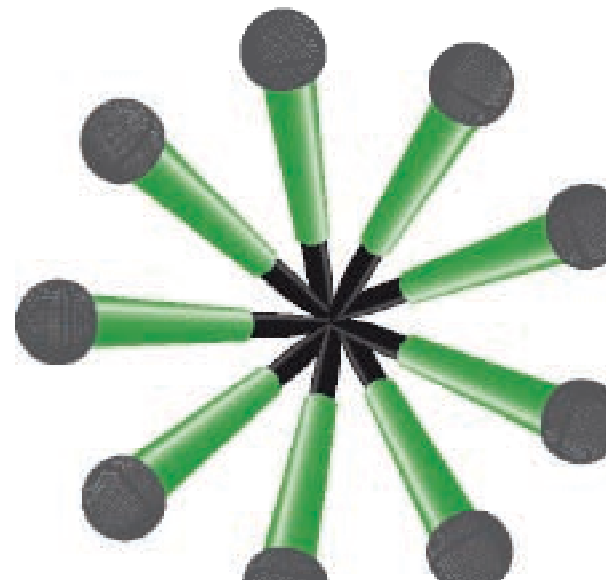
For newspaper interviews, if the journalist wants more than the press release, you will be interviewed face-to-face or over the phone before a feature or news article is written.

## **Preparing for an interview**

Think about who your audience is in advance – find out when the interview will be aired or published and consider who may be watching, listening or 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 the main questions or 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 (eg a short clip or a longer feature)?
- Is it a one-to-one interview or a group discussion? If it's the latter who else will be involved and what are they likely to say?

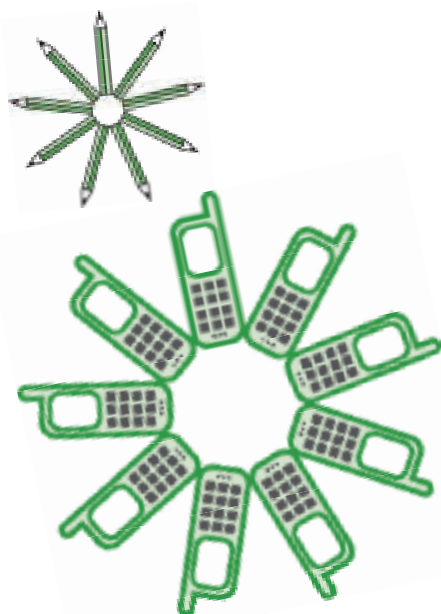


# Top tips: before, during and after interviews

There are plenty of ways to ensure you get the best from your media interview. We've highlighted some key hints here.

## Prepare and practice

- **Write down your three key messages** – these should be the three most important things you want to communicate.
- **Be prepared for obvious questions.** For example, who are Friends of the Earth? What is climate change? How many people have signed your petition? Why are you here?
- **Anticipate difficult questions.** Write down the arguments that might be made against your points and prepare answers. For example, is climate change just a theory? Think of answers that will help you make your point
- **Practise out loud** in front of a mirror, into a tape recorder or video camera, or to a friend – this will help you feel prepared and build your confidence.

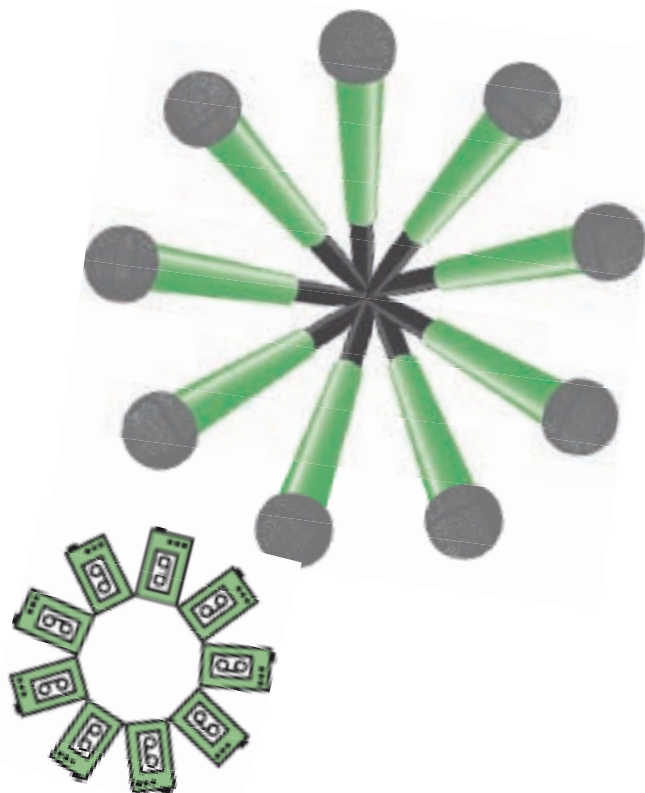


## Lights, camera, action

- **Remember to say your three key messages.** The interview will only be short so you need to get your key points across as early as possible. When you are asked a question try to answer in a way that brings the conversation back to your key points.
- **Try not to fidget, sway or rock from foot to foot** – it can make you look unconfident or shifty.
- **Eccentric clothing or behaviour will distract the viewer.** If your presentation is understated and neat 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. Make sure your passion and enthusiasm come across too.
- **Connect with the listener;** identify local examples and refer to real life situations.
- **Don't lecture the listener,** viewer or reader on how to live their life. Instead sell the benefits of what you are campaigning for.
- **If you don't know the answer to a question then say so, don't pretend.** Steer your answer back to your key point by saying "I'm not sure about that but what I am certain about is etc".

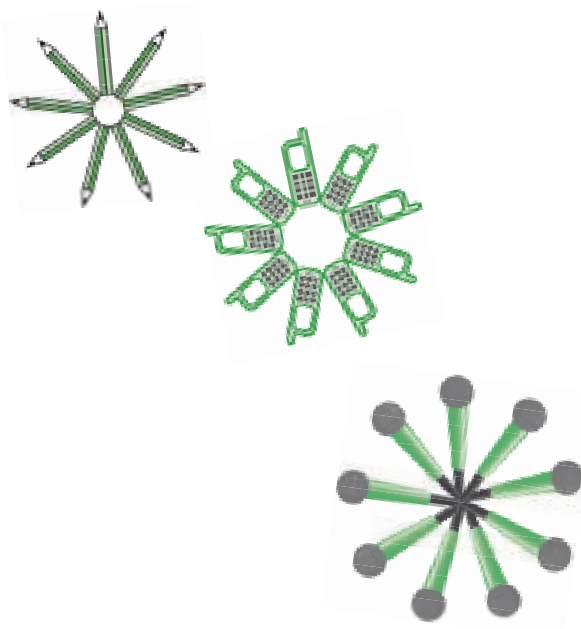


- Do not lie.
- Do not lose your temper or get angry. Staying cool, calm, and collected is the best way to win the argument.
- Don't forget to mention Friends of the Earth and the name of the campaign – people need to know who to go to for more information if they are inspired by your interview.
- If you stumble with your answer during a recorded interview, stop and ask for the question to be put to you again.
- When you talk to a journalist anything you say can be quoted. Nothing is 'off the record'.
- If you are doing a radio interview over the phone, make sure you are in an area that is quiet and free from interruptions. This will allow you to concentrate without feeling self-conscious and avoid noise interference on the recording.
- 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 above the interviewer's head.
- Take advantage of the time it takes the camera operator to set up the equipment to ask the reporter any questions you have.



### When it's all over

Congratulate yourself and 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 will be appreciated. Finally consider possible reactions to the interview and prepare for any follow up work you may want to do.



## Case study: Renewables on the radio

November was a high point for High Peak Friends of the Earth. Group co-ordinator Richard Body was interviewed on Radio 4, as well as High Peak Radio, BBC North West Tonight and BBC2's Working Lunch – gaining great publicity for a new local hydro-electric scheme.

The group is supporting Water Power Enterprises in building the scheme which will be capable of powering 65 local homes. Profits will be used on local community projects. Richard tells us how he achieved interview success:

“We have a good story; the first community-owned hydro-electric scheme in the county. We wrote a press release, which was sent to the national media by Friends of the Earth's press office – Radio 4 was the first to respond.

“In the run-up to the interview, we worked on a set of likely questions and prepared our answers. Friends of the Earth Media Officer Anna Mitchell also did a mock interview with me and offered feedback.

“Most reporters will let you say what you want, but it helps if you know what format the interview will take. For example, High Peak Radio asked three questions and used the answers, one at a time,



Credit: Torrs Hydro New Mills

during the local news broadcast. The whole interview was used later as a feature. At one point I just read out the quote from the press release, but it sounded good.

“We set up the website before the programme was aired so that people could find out more information. The site received more than 2,000 hits after the Radio 4 interview, nearly 4,500 after BBC North West Tonight and about 5,500 after BBC2 Working Lunch. We're still getting up to 400 new visitors a day.”

Find out more and listen to Richard on Radio 4 at [www.torrshydro.co.uk](http://www.torrshydro.co.uk)

## Links and Resources:

'How to ... use the media' (2007)

'How to ... write a killer press release'

'How to ... get your letter in the paper'

These and other useful 'how to' guides are available on the Friends of the Earth Community website at [http://community.foe.co.uk/resource/how\\_tos/index.html](http://community.foe.co.uk/resource/how_tos/index.html). For further help and support contact your network developer (details on back page).

