

Sharing Your Story — Becoming a Media-Savvy Communicator



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How the media works — Reporters

- Professionals who want to share information with their audience (TV, radio, newspapers, online) in the most interesting, accurate way possible
- Generally objective, but may have an “angle”
- Most are generalists — they are not experts about your work



How the media works

- News is about debates, not announcements
- Reporters are under pressure
- News begets news
- Editors want a “human face”
- All news is local or topical



How the media works

- **Radio reporters** — tight deadlines; 30-60 seconds to present stories; lively voice clips needed
- **TV** — images and video important; limited time; 90 seconds per story; 15 seconds of your interview used
- **Print/Online** — more details can be provided; max. 2 paragraphs of what you say quoted



Why do reporters ask challenging questions?



- To give you an opportunity to answer tough questions so you can present your side
- Controversy makes a story more interesting — don't take it personally
- The reporter may be seeking to trip you up because they have an agenda or may see things from another perspective

Understand your rights



- To know in advance the subject of the interview
- To get an assessment of the reporter's understanding of your organization
- To know the other interview subjects for the story
- To tape record an interview (if legally permitted)

You do not have the right to

- Decide after the fact that something is “off the record”
- Retract statements made during an interview
- Review an article, audio or video recording of the interview
- Approve a photo of you if one is taken
- Know specific questions in advance
- Approve your quotes



Before the interview

- Research the media outlet
 - Reporter and what stories they've recently written
 - General tone of the publication
 - Readership
- Map your main messages (no more than 3)
 - Think of an example, anecdote or story to illustrate each message
 - Provide supporting details for your points where possible
- Practice answering potential questions, including questions you *don't* want to answer



During the interview

- Know exactly what you want to accomplish with the interview
 - are you **educating** or **making key points**?
- Keep answers **short**
- Be **engaging** and **dynamic**
- Stress **positive** information
- **Listen carefully** to the question you're being asked...even if you don't want to answer
- It's okay to say "I don't know." or "I'm not able to share that information." **Never** "*wing it*"!

Interview tips

- Use **notes** and other background information
- **Challenge** facts, premises and assumptions. If an interviewer misstates something or has a fact wrong, correct them politely
- Provide additional information at a later time
- **End** the interview after a reasonable amount of time
- No matter the questions, find ways back to your **key points**
- Think of each answer as the entire interview — **repetition** is the key
- Feel free to **stop talking** after you make your points. Be comfortable with silence
- **Restate your main message** at the end

What not to do

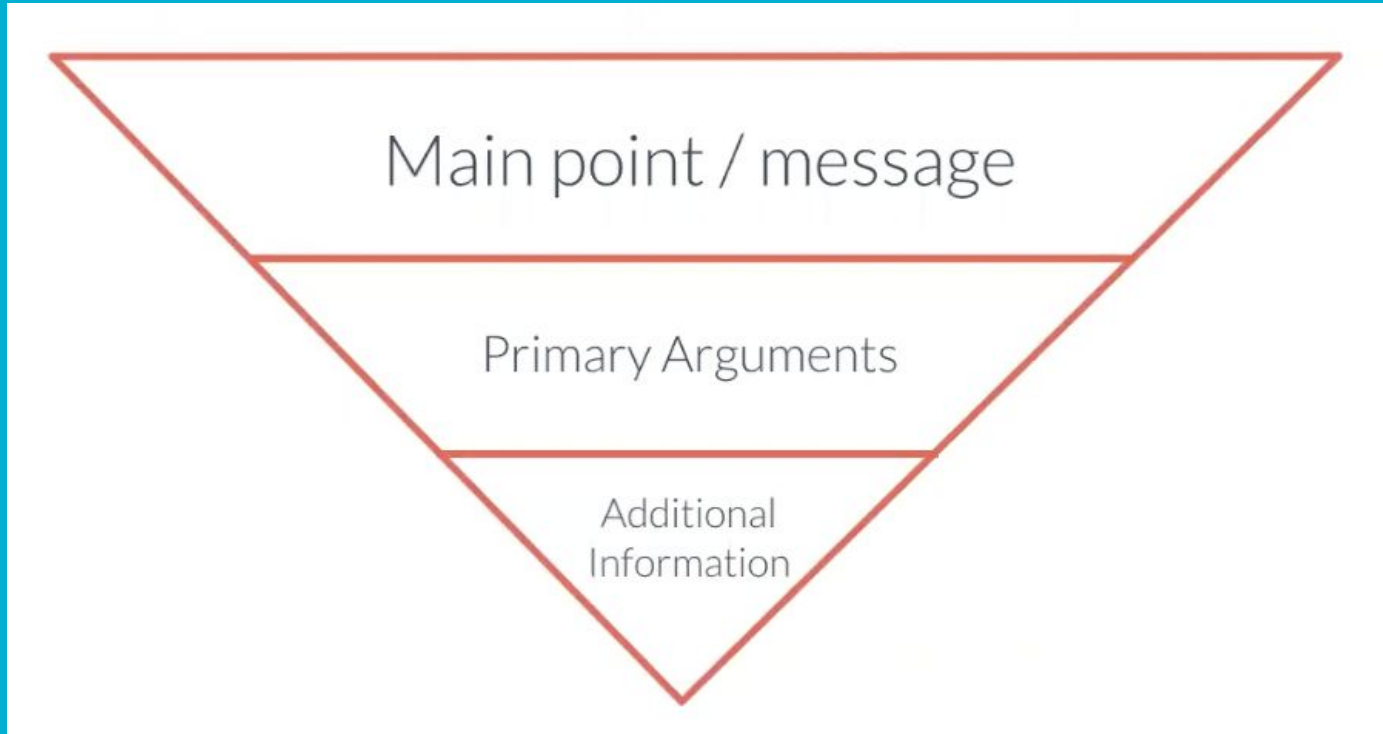
- **Don't make sarcastic remarks** that can be misunderstood or misreported.
- **Avoid acronyms, jargon, buzzwords and technical language**
- **Don't say "no comment"**
- **Don't keep talking** when the reporter is silent
- **Don't speculate, conjecture or guess.**
- **Avoid hyperbole and defensiveness**
- **Don't repeat a negative**
- **Don't argue** with the reporter

Use bridging techniques

- What's most important is...
- The real issue here is...
- Let me just add that...
- Let me answer you by saying that...
- That's an important point because...
- What that means is...
- Another thing to remember is...
- If you look at it closely, you'll find....
- I don't know. But what I do know is....
- That's not my area of expertise, but I think your audience would be interested in knowing that...

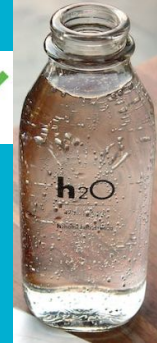


Prioritize information



What to wear

- Wear simple clothing — avoid white clothes and busy patterns, esp. plaids, stripes.
- Check your hair and your teeth.
- Make sure to hydrate with water before the interview.



On-camera interviews

- Be kind to producers, reporters and camera operators
- Sit/stand up straight
- Look at the interviewer and **not** the camera
- Speak slowly and clearly
- Speak in sound bites — pithy summaries
- Be relevant — people listen more closely to things related to their own lives



Telephone interview tips

- If called out of the blue and caught by surprise, tell the reporter you are busy, but you are happy to provide information at a later time. Ask about the focus of the interview. This gives you time to prepare for a future interview.
- Use a **landline** whenever possible or ensure your cell connection is strong
- Find a **quiet room** and shut the door



Remember ...

- Reporters *aren't* your friends
- Avoid going “off the record” and don't confide anything you don't want repeated on air or in print



Crisis communication

- Develop a crisis communication plan
- Identify key spokespeople
- Prepare key talking points
- Respond quickly
- Be *appropriately* transparent
- Control the message
- Monitor media coverage
- Do an after-action review



