



So you're going to be interviewed!

Tips for giving great interviews

2024 | Find more resources [on the website](#)



Stay on message

Tip 1: Keep it focused, keep it simple

More information is not better—you can easily overwhelm, confuse and lose your audience’s attention with too much detail. The average audience in the United States has a 9th grade vocabulary, so shorter and simpler is usually better—try not to speak for more than 30 seconds at a time so the listener can keep up.

Tip 2: Start with your strongest statement

Make your first words the most important and memorable. Studies show that after 20 seconds people’s interest diminishes.

Tip 3: Don’t be intimidated by bad questions

If someone tries to interrupt your answers with questions, politely tell them you need to finish answering their prior question. If they inaccurately paraphrase your answers or throw out opinions as facts, politely correct them. And, don’t fill in a pause with rambling. That’s when the potential to go off-message is the highest.

Tip 4: Practice makes perfect

Prepare, prepare, prepare. Know your message so well that it doesn’t sound rehearsed or robotic when you speak. Instead, it sounds like you are speaking from your heart.

Tip 5: Be relaxed, don’t lecture

Be relaxed and conversational, so that your audience does not feel they are being lectured. This is especially critical for audio interviews, from podcasts to NPR.

Tip 6: The public knows less than you may think

Do not assume audiences have a lot of knowledge of your issue. Start with the basics, simplify.

Tip 7: Wear your passion for the solution on your sleeve, and smile!

Your enthusiasm for your work and your community is contagious—communicate that passion in your words, gestures, expressions and body language. Even radio listeners can accurately identify whether an interviewee is smiling or not by the sound of their voice when speaking.

Tip 8: Make people curious, direct them to more information

After someone hears you, you want them to be curious and learn more or explore ways to get involved. Make the “call to action” if appropriate.



Bridge back to your message

Tip 1: Internalize your message enough that you can weave it into whatever response you give to a reporter's question

Even if you are asked a tough question, you can use transitions to say what you want to say. For example:

- "Before I answer that question, let me just say..."
- "In addition to your question it is important for people to understand..."
- "That's a good question. Let me frame my answer by saying first off..."
- "At the heart of your question is this..."
- "An important question you have not asked yet is..."

Tip 2: When you are in a sticky spot, *always* bring the focus back to your key points.

The Bridge—Answer the reporter's question in a very brief and concise manner, and then use the opportunity to bridge or segue to your key points. Some popular bridges include:

- "I don't have all the facts to answer that question accurately, but I can tell you that..."
- "That used to be important. What's important now is..."
- "I agree we have a problem and I'd like to go directly to our solution..."
- "Your question points out a common misconception we hear often. The real problem is..."

Related techniques:

- **The Hook**—Entice the reporter to ask a desired follow-up question. Some easy hooks are studies, but your own experiences will always work well. For example, "You'd be surprised what our research indicates..." or "Our experience in XX showed..."

- **The Flag**—Help the reporter remember what you want them to by flagging your point. For example, “The key point to remember is...” or “The most exciting thing about this program is...” or “Don’t forget...” You may also underscore a point with enthusiastic inflection in your voice. Other flag phrases to draw attention to where you want it include:
 - “If I could only say one thing about this, it would be...”
 - “Finally...”
 - “The most important thing to remember...”





Provide quotable content

TIP 1: Make yourself quotable

Some sound bites are more memorable than others. A good quote is one that:

- You can picture (like “Cutting down the Amazon rainforest for money is like burning a Rembrandt painting to heat a bowl of soup.”)
- You want to share over social media.
- Anyone can understand with little or no context.
- Is free of jargon.

TIP 2: Pair data and statistics with analogies

Don’t lose people with too many facts and details. Create an image in the audience’s mind with a statistic by saying that a new airport runway is 30 football fields long rather than simply citing the statistic that says the runway is several thousand feet long. Use the Google Chrome extension called “[Dictionary of Numbers](#)” if you need to put quantities in context.

TIP 3: Tell stories or use anecdotes

People love stories—have a few in your back pocket to share at the right moment. For example, one of our favorites from Alaska is, “My grandfather described salmon runs so big that you could walk across the river without getting your feet wet during peak salmon runs.”

Tip 4: Avoid jargon and acronyms

You often talk to peers who understand the insider language around pipeline safety. For the general public, avoid technical jargon and acronyms. Stick to simple and direct words folks use in conversation and easily understand, or use analogies and visualization to explain new concepts.


Tip 5: Be positive, offer solutions even with grim situational stories

Focus on what you want to see happen more than what you don't want to see happen. Your audience wants and needs hope and solutions for them to feel empowered enough to engage on your issue.