

Guide to conducting media interviews

Part 2. Conducting media interviews

5. Tips for managing television interviews

Television interviews can feel pressurised - you have to be aware of your language, your body and your overall appearance. Movements and reactions can be exaggerated in a studio with strong lights, cameras and many people in the background. It is also difficult to walk away from television interview – so be prepared!



Before you agree to appear on a programme, check the following:

- **What is the programme?**
 - If possible watch a couple of episodes before agreeing to the interview, as this will give you an idea of the usual type of interview
 - What is the normal tone of the programme: controversial, chatty, informative etc.?
- **Who watches the programme?**
 - Find out what triggered the story – why have they contacted you?
- **Who else will be interviewed?**
- **What is the focus of the interview?**
 - Are you confident about being interviewed around the subject, or would you be better recommending someone else?
- **Where will the interview take place?**
 - In a studio with the interviewer?
 - In a studio local to you where you will be linked to the interviewer?
- **Will the interview be live, or recorded?**



What should you wear?

Television interviews are physical and intellectual performances. The audience will often take away more from your appearance or tone of voice than your message. Consider what impact your appearance will have – look tidy and choose simple, appropriate clothes.

- Avoid reds, bright whites, sparkles, checks and stripes
- Avoid too much jewellery or anything that might reflect off the lights, rustle, or jangle
- Some studios may offer help with hair and make-up, but if you are doing this yourself focus on what you are comfortable wearing ensuring you have a matt foundation or powder to combat shine under hot lights
- You might find it helpful to practice talking in front of a mirror to check your appearance, facial expressions and body language.

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At the studio

The first time you go to a television studio it can be a bit intimidating: often a large open space with multiple sets. There will usually be several cameras, lights, which can make the space quite hot, sound technicians and a floor manager on the set. The director and other team members will be stationed in a separate space. There may be monitors on the set so the presenter can see what is being shot.

Before the interview

When you arrive you may be required to go into 'hair and make-up', or a quick 'touch up' with powder to tone down any shine on your face when you are on set. This applies to men as well as women! Do not be afraid to ask for powder on set, if you feel you need it.

You will usually be asked to wait in 'the Green Room', with other guests until you are asked to go onto the set. While you are waiting, warm up your voice, mentally review your key messages and rehearse before your interview.

On set

Depending on whether the programme is live or being recorded, you may be asked to go on set whilst everything is being set up, or be called down immediately before you go on air. If possible:

- Check where you will be sitting. If the chair is too low, see if it can be changed
- **Ask the interviewer for their first question and prepare your answer**



Nothing is ever 'off the record' and this includes any conversations you may have before or after the interview

- If you are asked to wear an ear piece, check it is comfortable, if not tell someone and ask for a different one
 - Check what type of microphone you will be using. You may be given a clip on lapel microphone with a battery pack that needs to be attached to the back of you. This is normally attached to your waistband
- Be very careful what you say once you have the microphone fitted – once it is switched on it will pick up everything you say and do!

The floor manager will count down the time to the commencement of the recording, so that the presenter knows when to start the interview. The floor manager will also indicate when the interview needs to be concluded. Cameras may move around during the recording. The camera recording a shot will show a red light. Try not to be distracted by what is going on around you, but focus on the interviewer.

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Being filmed at another location

You may be interviewed at your office, at a press conference or an outside location.

- At your workplace, take control of your environment.
 - Choose a quiet meeting room, rather than your office
 - Make sure you won't be interrupted by unexpected visitors, or phones ringing
 - Check the space where you are being filmed is uncluttered by computers with messy wires etc.

If you live a long way from the television station, you may be asked to conduct your interview from a small studio in a local television station, where you will appear on the screen with the live interviewer. You may not be able to see your interviewer, but just to hear their questions. Imagine the camera is the person interviewing you and react to it in the same way as you would if you were face to face with the interviewer.

Acknowledge what you agree with by nodding



During an interview

Be aware of your body language:

- Sit up straight and lean forwards so you look alert and interested. Leaning back can make interviewees appear defensive/ arrogant. If the seat has wheels, be careful not to swing it
- Small gestures make you look animated and persuasive. They also lubricate your voice. Your voice will be 100 % more expressive if you use gestures. Start your interviews with your hands relaxed and slightly apart – try to gesture in your first response
- Keep your eyes on the interviewer. Eye contact is important for face to face interviews – it shows you have nothing to hide, and watching the interviewer's face may give you important clues about their interest in your response
- Don't look down and away – this can look as if you have something to hide
- Beware of nodding in response to negative statements by the interviewer – it looks as though you agree with them

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If you tend to talk too quickly in interviews or presentations, the following techniques can help you control your pace:

- Give yourself breathing time, take a quiet, deep breath before you speak – this will help calm you and also give you a few valuable seconds to think about your response
- Use repetition – it gives your audience a second chance to hear what you said, and your voice naturally slows down as you repeat the words
- Use small gestures – counting off on your hands can help punctuate your voice
- Make a conscious effort to sound all the syllables in words. Clearly pronounce the ends of your words, as it forces you to slow down. Practise this several times before you do an interview so that you become comfortable with it

Always be prepared for the unexpected

You might be feeling relaxed because your interview is going so well, or think it is almost over. Or you may have been called up by a journalist out of the blue. **Always be prepared to answer a question you are not expecting.** This ranges from something in the news that day, cuts to health budgets, a proposed law that will affect people with disabilities, a new treatment for rheumatic diseases, or something potentially controversial a journalist has found out about your organisation.

If you are asked to comment on something in this situation and do not know the answer or you feel threatened, respond politely and say, for example, you are unable to answer this question as you do not have the information at your fingertips, or that you are currently investigating the situation etc.

Never say:
'No comment'!

