

Media Training Cheat Sheet for Interviews | PR version

This cheat sheet is designed to guide you through the essential points of handling media interviews effectively, helping you appear professional, knowledgeable, and prepared.

1 Should You Accept the Interview?

Yes, if - The interview can enhance your personal and company reputation. - You have valuable insights on the topic and can provide expertise. - Declining might allow competitors to dominate the narrative.
Not, if You'd be sharing proprietary or confidential information.

Key considerations: Be aware that accepting the interview can help you reach target audiences and maintain control of your narrative. In controversial situations, speaking up can be your only way to provide your side of the story.

3 Relax! You're the Expert

Stay Calm - Treat the interview as a conversation, not a performance. - During phone interviews, make yourself comfortable to avoid sounding stiff.
Avoid Stage Fright Ignore the cameras or production team—focus solely on the reporter.

5 Controlling the Interview

Start with Your Big Idea - Lead with the most important message you want to convey. - Use an "inverted pyramid" approach, with key points upfront, just like reporters do
Use Vivid Descriptions & Anecdotes Bring your message to life with stories or examples that resonate with the audience
Call to Action Frame your message in terms of what your audience (not the reporter) needs to hear and act on

GENERAL INTERVIEW TIPS

Never Say "No Comment"
This implies guilt. Find a way to answer without revealing confidential information.

Frame from the Public's Perspective
Bring your message to life with stories or examples that resonate with the audience

Stay Calm and Don't Argue
Frame your message in terms of what your audience (not the reporter) needs to hear and act on

Tell the Truth
Even if the facts are unflattering, it's better to be honest upfront. This prevents a small issue from becoming a prolonged scandal

Never Go Off the Record
If you don't want something published, don't say it, even offhand

If You Don't Know, Say So
Promise to find out and get back to the reporter, then follow through

Answer Direct Questions Directly
Be straightforward when asked something specific, especially when dates or facts are involved

Avoid Offensive Language
Humanize your message with personal anecdotes. This makes you more relatable and quotable

Don't Exaggerate
Reporters verify facts. Stick to accurate, verifiable information to maintain credibility

Speak Naturally
Use contractions and speak conversationally for a more authentic tone

Silence is a Trick
Reporters often use silence to get you to reveal more. Don't feel pressured—let them move to the next question

Everything is On the Record
Any comment within earshot of a reporter is fair game, even casual remarks before or after the formal interview

2 Understanding the Media The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly

GOOD - Most reporters are just looking for accurate information. - General reporters may not be experts in your field, giving you the upper hand in guiding the conversation.
BAD Industry-specific journalists have deeper knowledge but still rely on your expertise.
UGLY Some reporters might be after sensational stories. Always remain cautious and controlled in your responses.

Types of interviews:
Print: Often conducted via phone. Assume everything is on the record.
Radio: Always recorded, so speak in sound bites.
Television: Video matters. Focus on short, quotable sentences, and remember that only a fraction of your interview may air.

4 Be Prepared!

Information You Need Before the Interview - What is the story about? - Does the reporter have a specific angle? - Who else are they interviewing? - What's the deadline?
Do Your Homework - Know your company's stance on the topic. - Prepare statistics or relevant data to strengthen your points
Practice Makes Perfect Anticipate possible questions and rehearse your responses.

6 Handling Tough Questions

No-Win Questions - If a reporter asks something designed to trap you (e.g., "When did you stop beating your wife?"), bridge to your key message <i>"At our company, we focus on solutions, and here's what we're doing to solve X issue."</i>
Avoid the Language of Denial Don't say, "I'm not a crook" or similar. It frames you negatively. Instead, give an honest, clear response that reaffirms your integrity

WHAT IS A SOUNDBITE?

Quick, memorable phrases that highlight your message.

TOP TYPES OF SOUNDBITES

Metaphor: Clarifies with comparison
Example: "Our team is the heart of the project."

Magical Three: Uses three powerful words
Example: "Connect, create, grow."

Rhetorical Question: Engages the audience
Example: "Are we ready for the future?"

Emotion/Superlative: Adds feeling or intensity

Example: "Nobody does it better."
Contrast: Shows differences
Example: "Big impact, small cost."

Paradox: Grabs attention with contradictions
Example: "A wise fool."

QUICK TIPS

Be brief: Under 10 words
Be visual: Paint a mental picture
Stay on message: Reflect your brand