Interviews

Adopted from Paul Mundy and Bob Huggan
Preparing for the interview
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- Best interviews where interviewer and interviewee are well prepared
- Select the image and message to convey
- Prepare phrases, words and issues
- Get info about the reporter: his/her views, interviewing style
- Be up-to-date on events relating to your org
- Anticipate questions, practise responses
- Give background info to interviewer (articles, press releases, brochures…)
Speaking to the media

- Your message must be easily understood
- Interviewee must sound natural and credible
- Keep the ultimate audience’s interest in mind – the interviewer is only a conduit
- Speak clearly, in relaxed way
- Don’t mumble
- Use clear ideas, simple words, short sentences
Speaking to the media

- Do not use scientific, technical, medical or academic jargon, or “NGO-speak”

- Avoid giving figures
  - They obscure the message
  - May be misheard or misquoted
  - May be open to dispute

- If figures are needed
  - Write them down
  - Give interviewer a fact-sheet
Speaking to the media

- Answer questions directly, confidently, and in few words
- Look interviewer in the eyes
  - Forget the microphone or tape recorder
- Listen to questions carefully
  - If a question is unclear, ask for clarification or rephrase it before answering
- Do not be afraid of silence
  - Just wait for the next question
Speaking to the media

- If an inaccurate statement is made, correct it immediately
- If interviewer is argumentative
  - Danger of sounding hostile!
  - Stay calm
  - Don’t argue back
If you don’t know the answer

- Say so
- Refer to someone who knows
- Offer to check info and get back later
- Never say “No comment”
- Give valid reason for not answering
Controlling the interview

- Repetition
  - Repeat your message to help the interviewer and audience remember it
  - State main message several times
  - Vary the words a little
Controlling the interview

- **Bridging**
  - Use a phrase to “bridge” to your message
  - Deal with question, then follow with the message

- **Examples**
  - “You’re correct… (answer) but in addition, let me say…” (bridge)
  - “That’s not 100%… (answer) let me explain…” (bridge)
  - “Well, that’s the way it used to be (answer), but here’s what we do now…” (bridge)
Controlling the interview

-Flagging
  - Emphasise most important points

-Examples
  - “The most important thing you have to remember is…”
  - “We’ve talked about a lot things today, but I think it comes down to these three main points…”
  - “Finally, let me make one thing perfectly clear…”
Controlling the interview

■ Hooking
  □ An additional bit of info to attract follow-up question
  □ Like fishing hook with bait

■ Examples
  □ “We are currently developing a major project with mothers in……” (reporter may ask for more info)
  □ “I believe that the countries in the Caribbean can overcome their nutrition problems” (reporter may ask how)
Controlling the interview

- Off the record?
  - Reporter hopes to get sensitive info
  - Never give info off the record
  - Some reporters misuse the info
  - Info may be traced back to you
  - Don’t say anything you don’t want attributed to you
After the interview

- Make sure the tape recorder is turned off
- Thank the reporter
- Offer to provide additional info, or introduce colleagues
- Offer to check story for factual errors only (reporter may not agree)
- Ask when story is to be printed or broadcast
After the interview

- **Record broadcast** or collect newspaper cuttings
  - If story is **positive**, consider sending to key stakeholders
  - If story is **fairly accurate**, don’t complain about minor errors
  - If the story **very inaccurate**, ask editor or producer for a correction

- **Keep in touch** with reporter
  - Add to mailing list for news releases
  - Offer to provide info on other stories
10 rules for negative press calls

1. **Be prepared** before talking with the press
   - Formulate your strategy
   - Thoroughly research the facts
   - Familiarize yourself with the existing media coverage
   - Try to anticipate questions – have staff role-play as journalists
   - Prepare strong, forthright answers

2. **Answer all press enquiries** – do not give perception of deceit

3. **Give complete, concise answers** in tone to suggest you’re totally on top of situation
4. **Use facts** (where possible) to counter opposing views
   - Don’t rely on opinions
5. **Stress the positive**
6. **Do not repeat inaccuracies**
7. **Reframe the situation** using your terminology
10 rules for negative press calls

8. **Explain your reason** if you cannot answer
   - “Not enough information yet”, still unofficial, etc.
   - Say you’ll get back quickly

9. **Do not participate in mud-slinging**
   - Don’t attack opponents
   - Maintain your credibility

10. **Never state your personal opinion**
    - Even when asked
    - Give only official, agreed response
Print interviews

- Generally longer than radio or TV interviews
- More words in print than broadcast
  - Can say more about your org
  - More opportunity to develop your messages
- Ask beforehand where and when story will appear
Print interviews

- Don’t be afraid of tape recorder – it increases chances of being quoted correctly
  - Consider bringing your own tape recorder to verify what was said
- Bring written facts and figures
- If you check story for accuracy, correct only the facts
- Tell reporter how to reach you before story is published
Radio interviews

- Types of radio interviews
  - On-air (live)
  - Taped, to be aired at a later date
  - In studio
  - On location, inside or outside
  - Over the telephone

- Tape may be used in entirety, or edited
Radio interviews

- Find out **interview situation**
  - Location, live/taped, topic, reason for interview
- Control your **voice**
  - Open with confident voice
  - Vary your voice: speed, tone, volume, not a monotone
Radio interviews

- Use interviewer’s name in some answers
  - “Well, James, that’s one question I can answer.”

- Put key messages in several short responses
  - If tape is edited, some messages will remain
  - Conversational language
  - Avoid long, rambling responses
Radio interviews

- If you have to pause to think, stay silent
  - No “ums” or “aahs”

- Avoid noises
  - Don’t hit the table
  - Don’t jangle coins or click pen
  - Turn off your cellphone

- Clever interviewer may create silences, to lure you into talking
  - You don’t need to fill gap. Let interviewer break silence
Radio interviews

- **Telephone interviews**
  - If asked to give immediate telephone interview
  - Say that there’s someone with you and you’ll call back in a few minutes
  - This gives you time to prepare

- Before interview, make sure nothing will disturb you
  - Close office door
  - Turn off noisy air conditioner or fan

- Practise!
TV interviews

- Similar to radio interviews
- But now you can be seen and heard, so appearance and actions are important
- Get to studio early so you are familiar with set, camera positions
- Think: “the audience is interested in this topic”
TV interviews

- **Clothing**
  - Yes Dress conservatively
  - Yes Solid colours are best, but **avoid** white – it can reflect light
  - No unusual styles or vivid colours
  - No loud checks or stripes, or small prints
  - No sunglasses or light-sensitive glasses
  - No rings, bracelets, necklaces, or flashy watches
  - Make sure jacket pockets are empty: **no** bulky items
  - Keep your jacket pulled straight so **no** wrinkles
TV interviews

- **Body language**
  - Look directly at interviewer, not at camera (unless told to do so)
  - Sit erect
  - Lean forward slightly from time to time to give impression of alertness, control, interest in the questions
TV interviews

- Use **gestures** to emphasize something
  - But avoid sweeping arm movements
  - Avoid eye-distracting movements
  - No fidgeting: swivelling chair, playing with pencil, finger-drumming