



MEDIA INTERVIEWS 101



KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE

Know to whom you are talking. If you're speaking with a print journalist, review his or her previous stories. If you're appearing on television or radio, watch a past segment to get a sense of the show's tone and format.

Tailor your responses to the reporter, the outlet and the audiences they reach, and be mindful about his or her existing level of knowledge of your issues.

>>> A reporter who regularly covers your area of expertise for a legal publication might be very familiar with civil legal aid work and may appreciate nuanced analysis or fresh, new angles.

>>> General assignment reporters for a mainstream media outlet or general TV and radio audiences might not have background knowledge of your field and may need more basic information.

Regardless of your audience, think of ways you can explain your work using analogies, images and interesting language. Avoid jargon, acronyms and overly technical language.



FACTUAL SUPPORT

Prepare as much as you can for the conversation. Think about what you would like to see in the resulting media coverage and plan accordingly. Prepare the 3-4 key messages that you'd like to convey and say them in a succinct, engaging and accessible way.

Prepare facts to back up your points, and cite sources when appropriate.

Before the interview, think about **tough or hostile questions** a reporter might ask and prepare honest, convincing responses.

Don't be afraid to **direct the interview**. Keep your goals for the interview in mind and proactively steer the conversation.

Don't wait for a reporter to ask the question that perfectly sets up your main points. Instead, **segue into the topic** you want to discuss by saying, "What really matters is..." or, "The most important issue is..."

Steer the conversation to one of your key points if a journalist asks you a question you feel uncomfortable discussing.



V

BE RELAXED AND SPEAK CONFIDENTLY

Do your best to relax. If you are nervous or this is your first time talking to a reporter, it is OK to say so (off camera or off the air). A good reporter wants to get it right, so will work to make you comfortable. Speak with confidence and enthusiasm.

Listen carefully to each question. Take a few seconds to frame your answer.

For television interviews, **smile when you speak**—even when tackling difficult subject matter. It conveys confidence and enthusiasm.

V

ON THE RECORD, OFF THE RECORD & ON BACKGROUND

Unless you specify otherwise, assume that everything you say is **on the record** and can be used in a story.

If you want to convey something **off the record**—meaning it cannot be used for publication—be very clear about it. Say, “This is off the record” **BEFORE**, not after your statement.

Alternatively, you can request for your conversation with a reporter to be “**on background**.” This means that details from your conversation can be used in a story, but the reporter cannot use direct quotes or identify the specific source of the information.

It’s important to note that journalists and media outlets often have differing views of what “off the record” and “on background” mean, so it is usually best to avoid these arrangements if possible to avoid unwittingly releasing sensitive information and/or being identified as the source of it. If you do need to use one of these arrangements, have a very explicit conversation at the outset with the journalist about what the terms mean.

Given the potential for confusion and miscommunication, it is strongly advised to **only convey information you feel comfortable being public**.

If it seems that you have been misunderstood, **fix it immediately**. Be gentle, but ensure the mistake is fixed.

Be careful making jokes or speaking sarcastically; this can be easily misconstrued or misrepresented.



AFTER THE CONVERSATION

Politely request that reporters include a link to your new work, research paper, or website if possible.

Be clear about how you would prefer to be identified. If you prefer your academic affiliation, or prefer to be identified as the author of your new book, or want to make sure the name of your organization or Voices for Civil Justice appears in the story, let the reporter know.

If the reporter asks for it or if it seems appropriate, **email links** or any other helpful information.

