

**10 Steps
to
Successful Interviews**

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Introduction

A media interview can be an extremely effective way to reach a large number of people with the information you want to relay. Through careful preparation and execution, you can turn interviews into an opportunity to raise awareness, clear misconceptions, and deliver key messages.

Your extensive knowledge of the subject will provide the foundation for the interview. Applying strong interviewing skills will help you maximize the impact of your message and successfully communicate your expertise to the public. Following are 10 steps that, once mastered, will prepare you to meet the media, and meet them well.

Step One: Always Prepare for the Interview

- Know the contents of the interview in advance
 - What is the topic?
 - Who is the audience?
 - What do you want them to know?
- Get details about the specifics of the interview
 - Is it live or taped?
 - Will there be other guests?
- Respond to messages from reporters promptly to allow them to make deadlines
- Anticipate tough questions and prepare responses
- Practice your responses
- Research the topic for interesting statistics, studies, stories or other related interviews
- For TV interviews, prepare visuals (slides, drawings, video clips)

Step Two: Know Your Message

- Determine the one key message you want to deliver – This is the “so what” for the audience
- Tailor your message to the audience
 - Does the media outlet primarily reach older women, single young men, or parents?
- Jot down three supporting points that bring your message to life
 - story, date, and analogy
- Through the interview, “bridge” back to your key message

Step Three: Understand the Reporter’s Perspective

- Determine what interests the reporter most about the story
- Find out whom else the reporter is interviewing
- Be sure about what led the reporter to do the story – a specific study? A recent article?
- Read/watch/listen to one of the reporter’s stories
- If time permits, talk to peers who have been interviewed by the reporter to learn more about the reporter
 - Is the reporter knowledgeable about your subject?
 - Does he or she typically look for controversy?

Step Four: Add Interest to the News Story?

- Explain the subject/scientific research in a way that will appeal to a broad audience
- Consider the “human interest” angle of your story
- Use stories to make an interview memorable (anecdotes or visual examples)
- Look for visual possibilities for your message
- Recognize anything controversial on the topic
- Keep your facts straight and provide complete information
- Provide “newsworthy” information (medical research/breakthroughs, human-interest stories) and avoid self-promotion

Step Five: Communicate with Confidence

- Put your strongest point first in response to a question
- Summarize your message with a few simple, hard-hitting phrases
- Make the message memorable through the use of anecdotes, study results, illustrations, case histories or analogies
- Use layman's terms and avoid jargon
 - Use "swelling" instead of "edema"
 - Say "rheumatoid arthritis" instead of "RA"
- Turn negative questions around to make a positive point
 - If asked about risks, respond with a safety record
- Use simple, listener-friendly statistics
- Present only your views
- Be honest at all times and do not guess on unfamiliar points

Step Six: Avoid Being Misquoted

ESPECIALLY FOR NEWSPAPER AND MAGAZINE INTERVIEWS

- Provide the reporter with ample background information before the interview
- Stay "on the record" at all times
- Come prepared with specific facts and background information
- Speak slowly, especially for main points and complex ideas, repeat as necessary
- Summarize your main message at the end of the interview
- Plan your answer and call the reporter back before a deadline once you confirm the facts, if necessary
- Send any follow-up information you have promised as soon as possible

Step Seven: Handle Hostile Interviewers Professionally

- Stay calm and listen carefully to what is being asked
- Answer as positively as possible
- Respond with a strong statement and then follow-up with additional supporting information
- When asked multiple questions, pick out the one question for which you have the best response and then ask the reporter to repeat the other questions again
- When interrupted during a response, recognize the need to address the interruption, but quickly finish your original point
- If the interviewer tries to put words in your mouth, clearly say, "That's not what I said. What I said was"
- During a "pregnant pause," do not hurry to fill in the lull, wait it out or ask if there are additional questions
- Do not feel obliged to choose between options presented by the interviewer, unless you agree with one or the other
- Avoid the temptation to battle it out with the interviewer – stay calm, professional, and positive

Step Eight: Communicate Effectively

ESPECIALLY DURING BROADCAST INTERVIEWS

- Make each reply short and deliver a stand-alone message
- Vary your pitch, rate and volume to add interest to your message
- Give main message points slowly and forcefully for emphasis
- Present complex information slowly and simply
- Rehearse messages aloud prior to broadcast
- Tell stories in a quick, relaxed manner
- Try to ignore distractions in the studio by concentrating on your discussion with the interviewer
- For TV interviews, wear solid colors such as navy blue, but never wear a black or white shirt

Step Nine: Keep Your Cool During Shows with Callers or a Studio Audience

- Avoid diagnosing callers/audience members
- Do not allow callers/audience members to draw you into a fruitless debate
- Stick with the main topic, do not be led into unrelated territory
- Demonstrate concern during horror stories, but maintain confidence in your position
- Remember that radio stations can edit inappropriate remarks made by a caller
- Use notes, if necessary, for radio interviews (keep paper shuffle to a minimum)

Step 10: Enjoy Yourself!

- Be yourself
- Try to stay as relaxed as possible
- Let hand movements and body language flow naturally as you speak
- Let your natural enthusiasm come through (particularly on television); it's often contagious