

**Queensland Conservation Council
1998 Conference**

Media Training Notes and Manual

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Introduction to the media

We are all media experts

Whether we realise it or not and more importantly whether we agree with it or not, most of us are active players in the mass media game and media interview veterans.

We listen to radio talkback on the way to work, watch the new and current affairs programs at night and regularly see political and business personalities being grilled by fearless interviewers with the public's interest at heart. Even when we try to relax and switch on the television, chances are we'll watch a late night chat show where the host interviews the rich, famous, infamous or the bizarre.

Being part of an organisation or lobby group, you must ask yourselves what you hope to gain by appearing in the media, and once you are there, how can you maximise your impact, credibility and ultimately the net effect of your efforts.

It is critical that if you seek to present your case in the media or gain coverage of your activities, you must learn the techniques and tricks of the trade that will allow you to maximise the effectiveness of every interview you undertake, whether you want to put your case across or attempting to minimise potential damage.

One of the most valuable tool sets this manual provides, are the media interview templates. These templates, will guide you and assist you whether you are appearing on talkback radio, drive time, current affairs or during a crisis.

The ability to adapt these templates to your particular situation will enable you to address the situation with confidence and help you gain the most from your media exposure.

So often, when we watch, listen or read a media interview, we fail to grasp or quickly forget the techniques used by both interviewers and interviewees. Techniques outlined in this manual will ensure that this will not happen when you are on air or in print.

The purpose of editorial coverage

There is no conclusive evidence to suggest that the media dictate the opinion of its audience. In fact, surveys in Australia show that when information is reported in a way contrary to the beliefs of the audience, it is perceived as being biased.

One interview in isolation will not necessarily persuade readers, viewers or listeners to your opinion. Rather, it will simply give you the opportunity to present your point of view in a conversation or issue. It will direct the audience attention and expose them to an alternate view. The topics, concepts, ideas and views expressed in the media any particular day, shape much of people's interpersonal communications for that day.

How to use each medium most effectively

If the media is responsible for shaping the topics of conversation of the day, how much do people use the media as a way of actively learning about a set topic or issue?

Recent research has shown the following:

Television

60% listen just for the music
20% listen because they like the presenter
10% listen out of habit
10% listen for the news

Radio

70% watch for entertainment
10% watch out of habit
20% watch to keep abreast of the issues

Radio

60% listen just for the music
20% listen because they like the presenter
10% listen out of habit
10% listen for the news

Newspapers

50% read out of habit
30% read for specific information (real estate, jobs, etc.)
20% read to pick up the news of the day

When you appear in any of these different mediums, these statistics need to be kept in mind. On television for example, the interviewee must be visual, using colourful expressions, anecdotes and body language. On television, people want to be entertained and not lectured in depth.

On radio, the interviewer is the listener by proxy; they are the audience's friend. On a talkback show or interview never argue with the interviewer. If you have to, pretend that you didn't understand the question or laugh as if they are having a go at you. You may win the argument with the host, but you will lose your audience and your credibility.

Different media for different purposes

Each medium has a unique way of communicating with the audience and all media campaign should be designed with the audience in mind rather than using a scattergun approach to the provision of information.

Serial Media

Television and radio are serial media. This means the audience tends to be much less active about what they choose to watch or absorb. People will sit through news of little or no interest to them and wait for more interesting sections to come along

If you have a topic of which people have little knowledge about or have little interest in, then television is the ideal medium, as it requires a short attention span on the viewer's part. This is much different from the active selection process employed by the very same people when reading a newspaper or magazine.

Specialist Media

Specialist media includes narrow focus newspapers, magazines and newsletters. This type of media is by nature very specialised and its audience very knowledgeable about the subject. Often specialist media is used in a broader campaign to highlight and clarify certain salient or emerging points in an issue.

Emotive Media

Television is also an emotive medium. To offset the audience's attention span, everything on television must be repackaged into a story with pictures and excitement. People tend to believe television because they don't generally look for bias in the pictures. They can read a story in the newspapers, disagree with it and call it media bias, but on television, there is a perception that the pictures don't lie.

Radio, is just as emotive a medium, but far less analysed by its audience. Most people who listen to radio find it a very personal experience and see the medium as their friend. Time and time again, listeners ask a radio host such as John Laws or Alan Jones whether they received and read their letter, fax or message. Talkback shows, personalities and music shows make radio the most intimate medium, and thus the hardest to get one's point across.

So, how does this help you when you design a media or publicity campaign? As a general rule, use **television publicity** to introduce new ideas and concepts to people. Use visual messages and exciting scenes to enthuse the audience and encourage them to believe your message because they can see it with their own eyes.

Radio interviews should only be used to reinforce your message with those already on your side. A well-conducted radio interview will assist in calling your supporters to action and further cement your organisation's point of view with the help of the host.

Newspaper coverage, particularly if in-depth, can document, clarify and support your argument with fact and figures. Press publicity can be of great assistance in changing the views of people and in allowing them to effectively compare the various facets of an issue

Developing your media management skills

Understanding how news is created

Identifying the newsworthiness of an issue is not as difficult as it may sound. The old tenets of news such as the rich and famous, the bizarre, pets and children are still as relevant as ever. The crucial point of generating news that is relevant to your organisation is the ability to translate an issue into a story into of relevance and interest to the majority of the population and thus gaining coverage for it.

The current waterfront dispute for example has all the ingredients to carry the news for weeks to come, both in its core form (the actual dispute) and in all of its spin-offs (the family tragedy angle, the children involved, the government conspiracy etc).

Once you understand what is of interest to the wider community, the real everyday Australia, together with a knowledge of journalism and what motivates journalists, you will be immensely better equipped to prepare effective media plans and strategies.

Traditionally, there are seven distinct news categories:

1. The rich and famous.
2. Accidents and disasters.
3. New discoveries, products and statistics.
4. The heroic.
5. Conflict.
6. Children and animals.
7. The oddball, outrageous and the bizarre.

These obviously are broad categories, but by fine tuning your communications to fit into one of these, you will assist the journalists in determining the news value of the story.

Many news organisations will use a formula to determine the newsworthiness of a story. Issues may be rated out of a possible 70 points against the seven news categories and will only make it in the news if they reach a predetermined score.

Other suggestions for generating news

Within the everyday activities of organisations, the opportunity will arise to generate newsworthy stories. Added to this, organisation can augment their chances of gaining positive coverage for their issues by establishing processes and systems, which will help, identify publicity opportunities.

Positive media coverage may come from:

- Plans for new projects and services.
- Progress on new projects.
- Introduction of new technology.
- Statistics and new records.
- Changes in regulation
- Policing of regulations in the interest of public safety
- Safety standards
- Environmental damage (or potential for)
- Notable achievements by the organisation or its staff
- New appointments, promotions, retirements.
- Historical milestones for the organisation.
- Significant contributions by the organisation to the community

News stories/interest can be generated by:

- Setting up internal news round, comprising of all sections of the organisation.
- Establishing an events or media opportunities register.
- Writing own media releases.
- Being alert for photo opportunities.

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- Conducting a poll or survey and releasing the results.
 - Staging events to tie in and coincide with broader events.
 - Stage a demonstration.
 - Pass a resolution.

Understanding your journalist

Understanding how journalists work, think and act, their deadlines and pressures gives you a great advantage in the race to have your issues reported in the media. The more assistance and convenience you can provide the media, the more likely you are to get positive coverage in your chosen medium.

The eight key professional responsibilities of journalism

1. The journalist's job is to find and report the news honestly, accurately, fairly and fearlessly.
2. The task to balance stories by presenting both sides, If because of time or other constraints they cannot achieve balance, they will run with one side only and try to follow up later with the other side.
3. They are required to keep themselves informed by reading newspapers, listening to radio news and watching TV bulletins.
4. Journalists consider they have a mandate from society to seek and report the truth and are not concerned if what they report upsets people.
5. They have a code of ethics, which requires them to report honestly, accurately and fairly, and to protect their sources.
6. They are subject to the laws of defamation.
7. If they cannot obtain information from one source, they must immediately go to others.
8. If a source provides information, then says it is off the record, the journalist is not bound to treat it as off the record.

Some common traits of journalists

- Journalists tend to see things in black and white, and this, and the rush to meet deadlines often leads to superficial, distorted reporting.
- Journalists usually respond to news, not pleas for help (or threats).
- Journalists want information **now** otherwise they might miss their deadline or be "scooped".
- Many journalists work in the evening and must keep in contact with their sources after hours.
- Journalists should not be asked to treat information as off the record unless there are grave reasons. In general they will not treat it as "off the record" in any case.
- Not all journalists will respect embargoes.
- Larger media outlets treat news releases as the basis for a story, rather than publish the release without alteration.
- Any attempt to persuade journalists to suppress information usually acts as a spur to them to go out of their way to use it.
- Most journalists are willing to advise outsiders whether or not they consider material offered has news value.

Building rapport with the media

The road to building a good relationship with the media is a to way affair. While an organisation attempts to gain the trust and confidence of journalists, the media has a vested interest in maintaining good relations with the various organisations and influential members of the community as these provide the raw material for their craft.

Here a few helpful rules to keep in mind when attempting to develop a working relationship with the media:

- Identify journalists likely to write about your organisation and determine if there is an assigned reporter to cover your industry or organisations' activities.
- Telephone and arrange to meet them at a suitable time.
- Advance a reason that will appeal to them i.e. you want to introduce yourself and explore the opportunities to provide news.
- Consider holding an annual function inviting prominent people along with the media.
- Arrange a meet the press lunch where and informal discussion can be held in a neutral location, such as a restaurant or café – always pay the bill!!
- If you publish a newsletter, be sure to always provide copies of it to the relevant journalist.
- If a journalist handles a story about your organisation favourably, phone or write and congratulate them and write a brief note to the editor commending the reporter.
- If the journalist misreports seriously, phone the reporter, tactfully point out the mistake and offer a new angle to allow the journalist to repeat the offending information correctly.
- Unless you want to alert them of urgent news, do not contact journalists near deadlines.

The golden rules of liaising with journalists

1. Abandon all hype (journalists will switch off)
2. Be friendly, but to the point.
3. Don't ask to have pictures returned or that the editor sign a courier receipt for the material as newspapers, radio and television stations do not take responsibility for lost items on loan.
4. Don't be afraid to tell them you will get back to them if you are unsure how to answer a question.

Your attitude

1. Your interviewer is simply a conduit – never get angry, or at least, do not show it. Never abuse and never become offended. Always remain on good terms, after all, you have been given a rare opportunity to talk to thousands of people.
2. 90% of all interviews start out as soft or friendly interviews. If you are newsworthy, your journalist will love you.
3. Always treat journalists with respect, they are just doing their job. Make them feel important.
4. Always thank the interviewer and keep the door open for another day.
5. Remember, you are the expert, not the journalist.
6. Help the interviewer by chatting over the topic before the interview.

Newswriting skills

Newswriting hints

The key words for the successful and effective drafting of media releases, feature articles and corporate material are:

- **Simplicity**
- **Brevity**
- **Accuracy**

When writing news stories, always start with the strongest point, the most important facts and ideas, as the story newsworthiness of the story will depend on the first couple of paragraphs and editors will cut from the bottom.

Ensure that you use:

- Clear, simple, concise sentences.
- One idea per sentence.
- One sentence per paragraph.
- Active verbs, and your name or your organisation's is worked in the first two paragraphs.

How to write a news release

Content

- Decide the sequence of information in your planning.
- Choose the most interesting or significant element for the lead.
- Establish a central theme and discard unrelated facts and info.
- Media releases and articles must always follow the WHO, WHAT, WHERE, WHY, WHEN, HOW formula – as you become proficient however, you can break the rules and create interest with 'tease' type of releases.
- Always try to put the "WHEN" in the first paragraph. The easiest place is around the verb, not usually at the end of the sentence i.e. 'The Minister announced today a new.....'.
- "WHERE" can usually be included later.
- Keep one timeframe per sentence.
- Avoid beginning sentences with "There is/are/was..."
- Don't state the obvious, and always be on the lookout for tautologies and hidden redundancies.
- Average 20 words per sentence.
- Paragraphs no longer than five sentences.
- Keep releases to one page if possible (double spaced), never more than two.

Style and presentation

- Favour short words to long (i.e. 'begin' not 'commence')
- Write simple sentences (no more than 20 words)
- Use direct expression (i.e. 'Three engineers worked on the project', not 'There were three engineers working on the project')
- Use active voice, never passive (i.e. 'The Minister said', not 'It was said by the Minister')
- Ensure your media release or article is typed, double spaced and preferably indent the first line of each paragraph.
- Include release instructions (i.e. 'for immediate release').
- Include a contact person and phone number.

News release structure

Paragraph/Subject	Content	Word Budget
	This sentence answers the	

1. Lead (Use the 7 news categories)	Who, What, Where, Why, When and How. In the lead, offer no speculation, no opinion and draw no conclusions.	30 or less (1 sentence)
2. Background	One or two sentences that briefly explain the history of the issue and sets up a quote. Mr Smith said the report follows..... Mr Smith said this action was initiated following.... Mr Smith made this announcement after claims of...	40 or less
3. Quote	Quote from the key spokesperson. “The review highlighted.....”	40 or less
4. Details	Key benefits or concerns. Mr/Ms said.....(paraphrasing concerns or benefits)	40 or less
5. Support	He/she said he/she had been working closely with..... (up to 3 prominent groups).	30 or less
6. Quote	Final quote from the key spokesperson. “This new legislation will.....”	40 or less
7. Further Information	For more information: XXXXXXX XXXXXXX	25 or less

The print media

Understanding print media

The requirements for dealing with print-based journalists differ from those for electronic-based journalists. Print news has been around since Roman times and the requirements are well established – remembering that today’s audience is trained to read newspapers from an early age (and that the reading age level of most newspapers is around 12 years of age).

Australia has one of the highest ratios of specialist magazines and newspapers per head of population in the world. As a nation we are well read and educated and aware of issues facing our country. So, where do our plethora of publications get their news from?

Almost **90%** of everything seen, heard or read in the media began with a media release from a community group, politician, lobby group, government department or business. While journalists consider media releases to be the bane of their existence, they also rely heavily on them.

In any one day, news gatherers can be forced to wade through up to 500 releases, most of which are poorly researched and written, badly timed, inaccurate or trivial. Only a handful are considered and passed on to a reporter. Even fewer, eventually find their way to air or into print.

In the event that your story is used, there are some marked differences in giving an interview for a publication compared to giving one for the electronic media.

How a newspaper works

When approaching a newspaper or publication regarding a story idea, it is useful to know who is responsible for what. Newspaper personnel are broadly divided into news gathering and production teams under the overall control of an editor.

The editor:

Mainly directs policy, with overall responsibility for gathering and printing the news. Control of the details is usually left to the news editor.

Newsgathering teams:

Reporters controlled by chief-of-staff or news editor are assigned to gather and report news. Sub-divided into round reporters who cover specialist areas ('beats') i.e. politics, education, health, transport and general reporters.

Production teams:

Sub-editors controlled by the news editor or chief sub-editor, with responsibility to decide which stories are to be published, where to place them in the paper and how much space to allot to them.

Specialist areas:

Feature sections, handling major feature stories, gossip columns i.e. Day by Day in the Courier Mail, letters to the editor.

General:

The size of a newspaper is usually determined by the volume of advertising, which is the paper's lifeblood. As an example, the Courier-Mail's retail cost, does not even cover the cost of the newsprint on which it is printed. As a general rule, 50-70% of the space in a newspaper is occupied by advertising.

The volume of space available for news on a daily basis fluctuates with the levels of advertising, thus competition among stories also varied with the daily amount of space to be devoted to the news.

Journalists, are not responsible for what is eventually printed, their sole task is to gather and report the news.

Managing the print interview

When you give a journalist an interview for a print story, keep in mind

1. What is my main aim for this interview? Write this down and look at it constantly during the interview. It will ensure you don't diverge from your main aim.
2. How do I want this to read? – you must visualise the story in print and state your points it will read because you will be quoted word for word.
3. Body language and vocal intonations will not come across – if you intend to stress or soften certain points with a smile or a louder voice, this will not come across in the story.
4. Be prepared for the interview to travel away from the original release and consequently be prepared to guide it back to the area in which you feel most comfortable. Journalists will usually have a specific angle in mind before the interview, and this may not reconcile with your main aim.
5. Prior to an interview, list all the possible questions you may be asked during the interview, whether they are related to the media release or not – positive and negative. Make sure that you have answers ready that you are comfortable giving and that help your cause.

For more information on how to prepare for an interview, see the section on interview structures and strategies.

Interview structures

Determining the interview format

The first step to a successful interview is to determine what kind of interview the particular medium wants. TV news for example will usually want a very short three to seven second 'grab' for the story that night. Your 'grab' will probably be one of several featured and the entire story will generally run for about 1 minute.

A radio interview in the peak drive-time period, such as a talkback show, may have you on air for three or four minutes, consequently, a totally different strategy is required.

The chart below outlines the various interview formats and shows how the journalists and editors will eventually shape the story which will go to air and use your contribution as part of the wider story.

	Number of grabs or quotes	Average length of grabs or quotes	Total interview length	Total edited story	Story format
TV News	1	6 - 10 seconds	3 - 5 minutes	1.10 - 1.30 minutes	Edited
TV Current Affairs	2 - 5	10 - 20 seconds	5 - 10 minutes	2.30 - 4.00 minutes	Edited or Live
Radio News	1	8 - 20 seconds	3 - 5 minutes	.40 - 4.00 minutes	Edited
Radio Current Affairs	2 - 5	8 - 20 seconds	5 - 10 minutes	2.30 - 4.00 minutes	Edited or Live
Radio Talkback	Multiple	10 - 20 seconds	3 - 5 minutes	All i.e. Live	Live
Newspaper News	1 - 2 sentences	1 - 2 sentences	5 - 10 minutes	200 - 600 words	Edited
Newspaper Feature Story	Multiple sentences	Multiple sentences	Up to all day	1/2 to 2 pages	Edited

The 6 point interview structure

Regardless of the line of questions or the angle taken by the interviewer, it is paramount that the interviewee is able to guide and direct the answers to their own agenda. If done properly, this maneuvering become seamless and the interviewee will be able to present their case in full and appear credible and knowledgeable. The 6-point interview structure comprises of:

1. Stating the problem
2. Solution credibility
3. The solution
4. Positive reference stories
5. Call to action
6. Thank the host

1. Stating the problem

Stating the problem and framing it in terms of its solution can solve any confusion quickly and effectively. The problem needs to be described quickly and illustrated, if possible, by a brief anecdote or story.

- Don't move further into the discussion until the problem is clear in the minds of the audience and the interviewer. If the interviewer states the problem clearly, agree and move onto the next stage.
- Stating the problem usually should take just one or two sentences.
- Don't complicate your answer.
- Make it very easy for people to listen to you.

Example:

-
- × *We've importing a new irrigation system from the U.S. and it's the cheapest and most effective available.*
 - √ *The problem is that farmers in Australia are wasting thousands of dollars each year on outdated irrigation systems because they don't know about this new technology.*

The way to plan this first step, is to determine your main point and work backwards analysing what 'problem' it is solving.

The problem statement created the need for your solution in the minds of the viewers or listeners and focuses the interview around what you have to say.

2. *Solution credibility*

This is the rationale behind the solution. A quick description of how you arrived at the solution. Who was consulted or employed to reach the solution and help you solve the problem? – How many community groups were consulted or endorsed your solution?

- Keep the discussion about how you reached the solution to about 100 – 150 words.
- Show the breadth and complexity or the simplicity of the problem.
- Tell a story of 'who go together' to solve the problem, who was consulted (the idea is to build in the mind of the audience a picture of integrity and credibility)
- Show that the solution is not just a knee jerk reaction but is considered, research and unbiased.
- Make the process of solving the problem into a story.

3. *The solution*

Once the problem has been stated and then given credibility to your solution, the time is right to introduce your solution.

Be enthusiastic, use anecdotes and infect your audience with your positive outcome. It's very important however that you keep your first sentence as simple and short as possible i.e. "The solution is to introduce....." or "The good news is that".

Explain carefully how your solution perfectly solves the problem identified earlier.

- This is often the first time in the interview where you personally endorse anything.
- Put the solution simply – one or two sentences only.
- Lead on to Positive reference stories.

4. *Positive reference stories*

The best possible way to illustrate the value of your solution is to tell success stories. Anecdotes about how successful the campaign or process has been elsewhere; about people who have contacted you relieved about your solution or the steps taken to arrive at the solution etc.

Remember to tell the audience with enthusiasm as everyone loves a good story, especially where a problem is being solved or a situation resolved for the better.

- People now understand the problem, they respect how you went about solving it and know your solution – now bring your solution to life by citing some positive stories.
- Use simple anecdotes of how people previously affected by the problem now have a much easier time.
- Describe a hypothetical situation and how much easier /positive your solution will make it.

Example:

- × *Many people will find the new parking rules convenient.*

Ö *“I had a woman who rang me early last week when she heard about our new parking ideas. She said to me that she’d wanted to take her children to the Gallery for so years but had never been able to because she wasn’t near public transport and she couldn’t drive because there was no-where to park. For the first time ever, she’ll be able to take her whole family to the Gallery so they can experience the works first hand.*

5. Call to action

If you can, at the end of the interview, encourage your audience to contact you for further information. If you don’t want them to contact your but rather to take action, tell them exactly how i.e. write to your local member/attend the demonstration etc..

- State simply what you want your listeners /viewers to do.
- Never bring up new information. Close quickly and confidently.

Example:

- a) *Give me a call on*
- b) *Why not put your ideas in writing and post them to*
- c) *Next time you’re in, Why not drop in....*
- d) *If you’re interested, the Association foris meeting....*

5. Thank your Host

- Quickly and sincerely i.e. “Thank you Rod.”

The 5 Interview templates

There are five basic interview templates covering all the possible types of media interviews. All seven, rotate around the basic 6 point interview structure outlines above. The templates are:

1. The feature interview.
2. The grab.
3. The press conference.
4. The talkback radio show.
5. The disaster or accident interview.

THE FEATURE INTERVIEW

Section	Contents	Words	Time
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Beginning			
A. The problem	Summarise the problem. "The problem has been..." "The problem is simply..."	12-35	10 seconds
B. Solution Credibility	A short discussion of how the solution was reached. Show the processes of how the problem was solved and who was involved.	100-150	1 Minute
Middle			
C. The solution	Two short sentences stating simply the solution you have found.	24-40	15 seconds
D. Positive stories	Tell positive anecdotes or stories about the success of the solution.	150-300	1-2 minutes
End			
E. Call to action	State simply what you want your audience to do (one sentence).	12-20	10 seconds
F. Thank your Host		5	3 seconds

THE GRAB

Approach	Examples
The Theme Approach x 3	"This is good news for" "This is good news for....." "And it's good news for"
The Three Point Approach	1) Main Point 2) Reason 3) Example
Headline Approach/Sensationalism	a) "This was a spectacular foul-up by the government" b) "Taking money in this way amounts to having your fingers in the till – it's not on" c) "Mr Jones and his cronies couldn't lay straight in bed"
Analogy Approach	"This is like giving money with one hand and taking it back with the other"
Parable Approach	"If you're stabbed in the back, it doesn't make it any less painful just because the act has been committed by a friend"

THE PRESS CONFERENCE

Section	Contents	Words	Time
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Beginning			
A. Format Outline	Announce the conference format to the gathering.	30 - 75	30 seconds
B. Facts Statement	Read a statement , include facts, figures, key issues to be considered.	450 - 750	3 – 5 minutes
Middle			
C. Open Questions	Open to a specific time of group questioning. Answer using the 'grab' structure.		10 minutes
End			
D. Individual interviews	Leave conference room to conduct individual feature based and short 'grab' interviews		

Press conference tips:

- Repeat your message as often as possible. Remember that it's only one of your answers which is likely to be screened. Therefore you should try to get your message across in every answer.
- Having decided what your main point is, reduce it to three sentences. Write it down and practice it.
- Avoid phrases like: "as I said before"; "if I could repeat".

Don't say , "Bob...(mentioning the journalist by name)" or mention the media by name, as another station may want to use your response.

- On touchy issues, prepare responses to the questions you most dread. Nine times out of ten you will not need it, but if you are asked these questions you'll be grateful for the preparation.

THE TALKBACK RADIO SHOW

Section	Contents	Words	Time
Beginning			
A. Feature interview	Start with the feature interview structure. Your call to action can be to ask listeners to call into the station.	450 - 550	3 minutes
Middle			
B. Question clarification	Clarify each question before answering.		3 minutes

End C. Answer with the 'grab' structure	Leave conference room to conduct individual feature based and short 'grab' interviews	75 words	30 seconds
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Talk back tips:

- Never become angry or frustrated with the questions or the host.
- If you want to bring questions back on track, indicate that they are a little off the topic and hand over to the anchorperson.
- Stay calm and relaxed.
- Be very careful to fully clarify each question. Respect each person who phones in.

THE DISASTER OR ACCIDENT INTERVIEW

Section	Contents	Words	Time
A. Summarise the situation	Two or three sentences to summarise the nature and extent of the disaster.	75	30 seconds
B. Freak accident	Emphasise the "once in a lifetime" nature of the accident.	75	30 seconds
C. Personal sorrow	One sentence about how upset you are or your organisation is and explain how you feel for the people involved at this time of tragedy.	75	30 seconds
D. What's being done now and what will be done	A two sentence explanation of what your organisation is doing and will do to ensure it won't happen again.	75	30 seconds
E. Call for industry enquiry	This could happen to any similar company or organisation. Show you want to ensure it won't happen again.	75	30 seconds

Note: All the above templates are designed to help you deliver a clear and structured message to your audience. At first they may seem awkward to use and contrived, but with practice, you will find them useful in any environment requiring a carefully planned message.

Preparing for your media interview

Devising your interview strategy

Once you have familiarised yourself with the type of media you will be dealing with and the various interview structures, you can begin outlining the content and presentation of your interview.

1. ***Know the one thing you want your audience to learn about as a result of your interview.***

2. ***Analyse your audience.***

- (a) Determine your primary target.
- (b) Know the program's demographics.
- (c) Identify your dominant audience
- (d) Approximate your audience's general level of awareness in your chosen area.

3. ***Preview the show to find out:***

- (a) Is it live?
- (b) Is it pre-recorded?
- (c) Do they edit the interviews?
- (d) How are the stories approached?

4. ***Anticipate the types of questions.***

- (a) Write a list of the questions you least want to be asked and draft answers for them.
- (b) Listen to the interviewer and determine the type of personality.
- (c) Know the expertise of the reporter.

5. ***Determine the interview format***

- (a) Television (news bulletin, current affairs, doorstep, feature entertainment etc..)
- (b) Radio (news, talkback, current affairs etc..)
- (c) Press (feature story, comment, gossip etc..)

6. ***The press conference***

- (a) Statement paper before taking questions gives journalists an overview.
- (b) Use statistics and hard facts.
- (c) Explain how you will conduct the conference.

7. ***Place of interview***

- (a) TV: find out background/props. Arrive 40 minutes early.
- (b) Radio: Either arrive early or visit the studio a day prior.
- (c) Your office:
 - check it's neat and tidy.
 - check it's big enough for camera crew, lights etc.
 - check the window is behind you.
 - check noise levels
 - minimise interruptions and hold phone calls.
 - when the crew arrives, arrange their parking, provide tea and coffee.

8. ***Make yourself the expert***

- (a) Research the topic and ensure you know the latest facts and research findings.
- (b) Consider taking a technical expert with you for the technical questions.

Interview tactics

There are some basic tactics for an interview. No matter how much you have prepared, the journalist will always have two advantages: they have done this many times before and they have a great deal of influence over the shape and content of what finally goes to air.

1. Don't try to win the argument with the interviewer. Never let any aggravation you may feel come to the surface. It will show on camera and the audience will usually take the journalist's side.
2. Don't criticise or patronise the interviewer for having the wrong information. Correct them gently. Remember that the reporter's question is usually edited out of the story leaving your aggravation to appear unjustified.
3. Under no circumstances lose your temper. On TV, arguments are won by the gracious and the most polite, not necessarily those who are right. Television is not only about information, it is also about entertainment. Having a heated exchange with an interviewer may make you feel better, but it does nothing to help you get your message on the news.

Often, when conflict enters an interview, the conflict becomes the news, instead of your message.

Coping with difficult interviews

Interviewers can make your life difficult for you in two ways. The first is interrupting you and the second is playing devil's advocate, putting propositions which are factually wrong, or presenting your opponent's argument. Here are the tips on how to handle both situations.

1. Interruptions

If you are interrupted, use one of the following tactics:

- a) Defer the question with controlling phrases like: "If I could come back to that in a minute" or "If I may finish" or "If I could return to the main point which is....."
- b) Talk over the interviewer – not necessarily raising your voice.
- c) Use a physical gesture, such as raising your hand slightly.
- d) Use very short answers, following the 'grab' formula.
- e) Wait shaking your head, then continue.

2. Denials

If the interviewer is playing devil's advocate or putting to you the opposite argument, or putting propositions that are wrong, it is important that you get your message heard by:

- a) Shaking your head while the accusations are being made.
- b) Opening with a newsworthy attention-grabbing phrase like: "Mr Smith's allegations are absolute rubbish." Then use a 30-second 'grab' structure to answer the claim.
- c) Stating what is the case by using a phrase like "The truth is that..." or "The correct situation is..." or "The facts of the matter are....."