

Press Pointers

Things to keep in mind when a reporter calls, says he/she is on deadline and begins firing questions:

Don't take a cold call

Never try to "wing it." Get the gist of the topic and tell the reporter someone will get back to her/him. Contact Media Relations for background on the topic and the reporter, if possible. If you're not the proper spokesperson, let Media Relations handle it. If you are the spokesperson, then consult with Media Relations and get back to the reporter promptly. Don't be unduly pressured by the reporter's deadline.

Have your own agenda -- make your points

Know the points your organization wants to tell. Write them down. Get those points into the interview. If the "right" question doesn't come up then work your points into your answers, or simply tell the reporter there are other points you think should be addressed. Maybe he/she hasn't considered that perspective.

Don't try to kill a story

It's almost always better to be part of the story. If you won't comment, the other side will. If there are legal issues or you don't have sufficient information -- say so. "No comment" is the worst comment.

Be honest

A good reporter has many sources and will test the story against a number of them. Even if the reporter is taken in by a false answer, it's still likely that a knowledgeable reader, viewer, or listener will not be.

Don't talk too much

Answer the questions as completely and concisely as you can. Don't speculate. Beware of hypothetical "what if" questions. Don't comment on the position of other organizations. Stick to your points and don't be afraid of silence. Don't go off subject unless you do it to make your points.

Don't go "off the record"

You are never safely off the record. If you don't want to read it, hear it, or see it -- don't say it.

Don't get mad

Some reporters will deliberately try to provoke you in an attempt to get juicy quotes.

Admit mistakes or inconsistencies

If your organization has changed its position from the one previously stated, acknowledge it and explain why. Don't believe what you said before is carved in stone.

Don't give your personal opinion

Unless the story is a personal profile, remember that you speak for the organization. You don't have a personal opinion to share. (Even if it is a personal profile, consider how your opinions align with the organization's.)

Play fair with the media

Even if they don't always play fair with you. It's almost impossible to get revenge on the media. Any boycott or other action just creates more fodder for them and more bad press for your organization. Hold up your end of the deal, be cooperative with the media, it will pay dividends in the long run.