

MESSAGE WORKSHEET

Before doing any interview, you should know why you were asked for the interview and what you want to say and how you want to say it. In addition to being knowledgeable and conversant about your messages, you also should have two or three subject-specific messages prepared to serve as your “commercials” for use throughout an interview. It is a given that the interviewer will come to you with their agenda -- it also should be a given that you have, and will get to YOUR interview agenda.

Message # 1

Message # 2

Message # 3

In reviewing your messages, make sure they each meet all of the following three criteria:

- Is it Short?** Think in terms of sound bites and one or two dozen quotable words.
- Is it Memorable?** Use crisp, high-impact words that will stick in your audience’s mind.
- Is it Positive?** Craft statements that emphasize the affirmative.

Engaging the Media

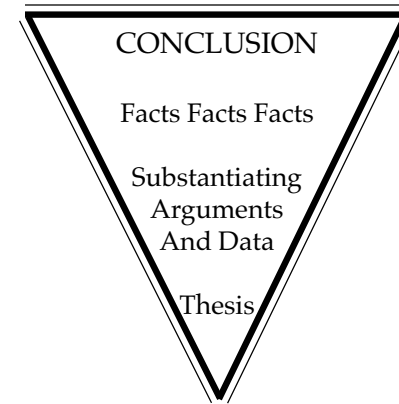
GETTING READY

Your success in an interview is directly tied to the **QUALITY** of your preparation and the level of control you exercise during the interview process. Don’t think an interview is a conversation and that you can “wing it.” View it instead as an **OPPORTUNITY** for you to make a well-developed presentation reflecting research, preparation and enthusiasm.

MESSAGES

You should never do an interview unless you know exactly what you want to say and how you want to say it. You should anticipate the issues and questions a given interview will present and be equipped with short, memorable, positive messages to respond.

Use the “Inverted Pyramid” to structure your interview answers:



Be aware of the constraints of time and space that dealing with the media brings with it. Although there are interview situations in which you’ll have the opportunity to talk at length, in the majority of interview scenarios it is critical for you to distill your messages down to 12-15 second sound bites or one to two dozen quotable words.

Given that you have no control over what answer an interviewer will use in the final story, it is equally essential that each one of your answers be a “home run.”

TOOLS

Here are some basic techniques you can use to control an interview and get your messages across:

Bridging is smoothly transitioning from the question asked to your messages. A direct question deserves a direct answer. But then, after briefly touching upon the answer, bridge to your messages and your agenda.

Hooking is taking advantage of opportunities before and during the interview to help focus on what you want to talk about. The idea is to entice the interviewer into your agenda. Tell the interviewer what it is that's on your mind -- you'll be amazed at how receptive an interviewer will be to talking about what you want to talk about.

Flagging is simply a way to underscore, verbally and nonverbally, what's important within your answers during the course of an interview. You can use voice inflection, a hand gesture, eye contact, body language or a phrase like, "What is really critical to know about this issue..." to ensure the interviewer and the audience have a clear understanding of what you think is important.

Personal Credibility is never forgetting that you are the expert -- that's why the media have come to you for the interview. Use your personal knowledge and experience to avoid speaking in the abstract. Critics will never be shy about their credentials -- neither should you.

REPEATING YOUR MESSAGES

An interview has a purpose, and so should you. During an interview, repeat your messages over and over to increase your audience's retention of them. Repetition is also important to ensure that your messages are remembered so clearly by your interviewer, that to leave them out of the final story would constitute a flagrant lack of objectivity

YOUR APPEARANCE ON TELEVISION

Television has a tendency to flatten your personality and animation. When appearing on television, remember to "pump yourself up" to compensate for that flattening effect.

Research shows that the average audience will remember only 7% of the words you say. The balance of their impression will depend upon your voice, face, clothing and the personal charm and credibility you bring to the interview.

Don't slouch, rock back and forth, swivel, twitch or twiddle. Make sure your facial expressions and hand gestures are appropriate to your words and the seriousness of the issue being discussed. Concentrate on your interviewer, maintain eye contact, and convey conviction and enthusiasm. Also, don't forget: if you're boring the viewers at home, they're looking for the remote control switch and you've lost a valuable opportunity.

RULES OF ENGAGEMENT

The Interviewer and Audience

Prior to any interview, you should find out as much as you can about your interviewer and your audience. But don't confuse the two. The former is only a conduit to the latter, and you should tailor your messages accordingly.

The Record

You should always consider yourself "on the record" and not say anything you don't want to see in print or broadcast. However, should you decide to say something "on background" or "off the record," clearly delineate that portion of the interview to ensure there is no chance of confusion.

Language

Always remember to speak the public's language and avoid acronyms, jargon, or technical terms. Your messages should be clearly understood by every member of your audience.

Keep Up With the News

Be sure that you are aware of what's been on the evening news and in the morning papers prior to doing an interview. Reporters and interviewers will know what's in the news -- and so should you, to avoid a potentially embarrassing lack of knowledge.

Arguments

The old saying goes: "You won't win an argument with someone who buys ink by the barrel, or video tape by the case" -- so don't argue. However, by the same token, there may be times when an interviewer is attempting to be confrontational, and you must "step up" to a situation to maintain control of the interview. Never let yourself become a passive participant in the interview process.

Correct the Record

Bad information has a way of propagating and taking on a life of its own unless challenged. If an interviewer asks you a question based upon false data, be sure to protect and if necessary, correct the record.

Honesty

Lastly, always answer honestly, and without saying "no comment." If you don't know the answer to a question, or if the information is not releasable, or would invade someone's privacy, it's OK to say so. Explain why you can't or shouldn't answer a question and then bridge to one of your messages.