

WORKING WITH THE MEDIA

This tool describes how to work effectively with both broadcast and print journalists. It describes how to prepare for an interview, what to ask the reporter, what the journalist's "ground rules" are, and how to handle the press when you are in "crisis mode."

This tool is invaluable for managers and leaders at any level.

	Radio and TV	Print
What should I focus on in preparation?	<p>What 1-3 points you want to make. How to talk in sound bytes. How to keep it simple. (Remember to make your points, regardless of what question you are asked.)</p>	<p>What 1-3 points you want to make. How to provide information and data to support your point of view. The difference between on the record, off the record, and on background (not for attribution).</p>
What do I need to ask?	<p>What's your story about? What's your deadline? How long a segment? Who else are you talking to?</p>	<p>What's your story about? What's your deadline? How long a piece? Who else are you interviewing?</p>
What about press releases?	<p>A good PR machine will issue a press release on a regular basis to tout your accomplishments. Let them know when you're available for an interview and whom to contact. Keep churning out the press releases, even if they don't get used. But make sure you've got some news to tell.</p>	<p>Same thing. Print reporters are less likely to respond to a press release. But have it with you at all times, so when they ask for more information, it's there for them.</p> <p>Don't be offended if they rewrite it or check all your facts. That's their job.</p>

Is it on the record?	It's always on the record when the camera is on, the tape is on. It may still be on the record if you're just talking casually. Always clarify this with the reporter. If they give you a puzzled look, chalk it up to their inexperience and say: "I'd prefer that nothing we talk about be on the record until the tape is running, okay?"	For print, you can control the interview by asking up front: Is this on or off the record? Always ask if you're not sure. If you haven't checked, you're on the record. Remember that and you'll rarely get in trouble.
How can I build relationships with reporters?	By being good on camera and accessible and by understanding how to deliver short, crisp, focused sound bytes.	By being accessible, both on the record and on background, you can build a favorable relationship with reporters. By being willing to speak on background, you can be a useful source, without being directly attributed. This can be useful for you if you are trying to float an idea or attack your enemies.
How should I handle an interview?	<p>Ask the reporter in advance what he's going to ask you. Most will be happy to cooperate, unless it's an emergency situation. Rehearse which ideas are most important to get across. Write your own script in your head before you speak.</p> <p>For TV reporters, think in 12-15 second sound bytes. That's one thought. "The city needs to clean the river to protect the health of our citizens."</p> <p>Then think in a second byte. "It's a shame that we had to experience a health crisis before we acted to clean it up."</p>	<p>For print reporters, ask them for their direction first. What is the story you're working on? How can I help you?</p> <p>For print, provide evidence and data to support your point of view. It's not good enough to say that the river needs cleaning up. Say: "The evidence shows conclusively that there's a health risk, and that the river needs cleaning up. And here's the evidence."</p> <p>You can have it written out in advance if you like, or provide graphics.</p>

	For radio, the same rule applies. Sometimes they'll let you just roll along. Rather than simply talking, organize your thoughts into sound bytes and then, when you've delivered 3-4 of them, stop.	
What about a time of crisis?	<p>Be sure you have planned how you're going to address the crisis. If it involves wrong-doing on your organization's part, accept responsibility and commit your company to doing the right thing for customers, citizens, and anyone else affected.</p> <p>Your body language will speak more loudly than your words. Maintain a serious, confident, and mature tone of voice and manner. Speak slowly and directly into the camera. Maintain eye contact.</p>	<p>Same idea. Print reporters will ask for greater detail, and so you must be prepared to give it. The most important thing is to act honorably: people are quick to forgive those who act honorably by admitting their mistakes and taking action to repair them. Even after the disastrous oil spill in Alaska, Exxon Corporation maintained its corporate integrity by admitting wrongdoing and paying for the cleanup.</p>

You can practice these techniques by engaging in role-playing with a colleague. Try these scenarios, and then critique each other's performance:

- You're announcing a new project (TV, radio and print).
- You're responding to questions about a serious issue (TV, radio and print).
- Your organization has been caught in an embarrassing situation (TV, radio and print).