



Tips to Be a Master Interviewee

- Practice answering questions in advance
- Speak slowly and give brief answers to questions.
- Pretend you're Henry David Thoreau: Simplify, simplify, simplify.
- Refer to concrete examples, personal experience, and clear images.
- Remember that reporters want stories, as well as data. Keep stats simple.
- Never assume journalists agree with you even if they act like it.
- Eliminate insider jargon and acronyms from your speech.
- Never say "no comment;" if you cannot talk about a topic, explain why.
- Do not answer questions with hypothetical scenarios.
- Assume that you are on the record while there is a camera or microphone around. They can still be on even when you think the interview is over.
- Suggest questions that reporters should ask of your opponents or critics.
- If you don't have an answer to a question, say so and try to get an answer later.
- Do not answer or repeat what if questions.
- Do not feel obligated to fill pregnant pauses. Sometimes reporters allow a moment of silence after your answers in hopes that you'll fill it. Do not ramble. Repeat your main message or ask if they have more questions.
- Do not answer personal opinion questions. Bridge to your main message, such as, "My personal opinion does not matter here. What's critical is that we make our schools tobacco-free, so that students don't learn to smoke at school."
- Don't feel forced to pick our of A or B dilemma questions.
- If asked lots of questions in a row, answer those you feel most comfortable with first. Usually that will be enough. You can ask them to slow down.
- Do not answer empty chair questions. This is when a report (usually bogus) is referred to within the question. Simply state that you have not read the report and cannot answer that question at this time.
- Develop different styles of communicating for print, TV, and radio reporters.



Print

- Remember that they have to write down what you say. Keep sentences clear and simple. Doing this increases the chances that they can use statements as quotes rather than them paraphrasing your words.
- Pick a place where you will not be disturbed. By phone, make sure connection is clear.
- Feel free to give the reporter some stats and information on paper that will help them write the article after they leave the interview.

TV

- Look at the person interviewing you. Do not look into the camera.
- Do not make distracting gestures.
- Never interview from behind a desk. Choose settings that will enhance the story. Consider taking the camera to the action.
- Wearing white is okay, but colors are better. Avoid crazy patterns.

Radio

- Speak into the microphone.
- Warm up your voice before the interview.
- Get there early so that you can try to go over the themes or questions in the interview.
- This can be really fun if you think of it as just a one-on-one conversation.
- Everyone makes mistakes on the air...even professionals. When you make a mistake, just say, "excuse me," and correct yourself. Don't just freeze.