

FOCUS: Media Interviews

TIPS FOR A MEDIA INTERVIEW

Capitalizing on Media Opportunities: If a Reporter Calls You Directly

As a member of Central Carolina Community College's administration, faculty, or staff you may be called upon by reporters to provide insight, analysis, background, or informed reaction to issues that will receive media coverage. If you are contacted directly by a reporter about your area of expertise and you feel prepared to answer the questions, please feel free to grant an interview. Be sure to ask the reporter's name, media affiliation, and a phone number/email address in case you want to clarify something later.

After the interview, please alert the Marketing & Public Affairs Department. The MPA Department monitors and tracks print and electronic news coverage of Central Carolina Community College.



KEYS TO A GOOD INTERVIEW

Be Responsive

Reporters tend to choose whoever is readily available and responds quickly. Journalists work under constant deadline pressure. That's why it is critical to understand the time constraints a reporter is working under when you are contacted. Return all media calls promptly.

Typically, in television and radio, interview times are pre-arranged. However, print and online journalists have daily and weekly deadlines. When they call you, they need you right then!

Keep in mind that an interview with a journalist is an important sales opportunity. Take advantage of it.

Know Who is Requesting the Interview

Before you agree to a media interview, it is critical that you know who is contacting you and the nature of the media outlet. This may be self-evident in the case of a newspaper like The Sanford Herald. But it can be tricky with lesser-known media outlets – especially in the age of web-based publications.

Read Before You Talk

If you get a call from a publication, take 5 minutes to go online and read a few of their stories. Also, look for articles they may have written on your topic. Finally, read articles written by the journalist you will be speaking with.

Know Your Key Points and Anticipate Questions

Think about what you want to say before you speak. Define two to three main points you would like to make about your subject. Gather facts, figures, and anecdotes to support your points. Stick to your main points and do not allow yourself to get off track. If necessary, repeat your points to get back on track.

Deliver your key messages even if the “right” questions aren't asked.

Anticipate questions the reporter might ask and have responses ready.

Be Succinct

Keep responses brief, but long enough to help the reporter get quotes. The reporter's questions may be edited and your response should stand on its own.

Stick to the Facts

Rely on facts – do not speculate. If you don't know the answer to a question, say so. Tell the reporter where to find the information, if possible. Or tell the reporter you will get back to him/her with an answer and do so quickly.

Ask for Clarification

If you do not understand a question, ask for clarification.

Correct Inaccurate Information

Don't overestimate a reporter's knowledge of your subject. If a reporter bases questions on information you believe is incorrect, do not hesitate to calmly correct the journalist before answering. It is important to educate the reporter and correct misinformation immediately.

Don't Let Reporters Put Words in Your Mouth

Reporters can use silence to make you feel uncomfortable and talk or say things you may not want to say. It is best to stay quiet between questions. Do not fill the silence.

Avoid Jargon

Speak simply. Talk in lay terms, using as little professional or technical jargon as possible. Tell stories and anecdotes that illustrate your point and give examples.

Remember the Audience

Most journalists are not interested in you, but rather the commentary you can provide. Refrain from using the words "I" and "my." When speaking to a reporter, keep in mind you are speaking to their audience and remarks should be centered on what their audience cares about.

Be Professional

Reporters have deadlines to meet and their time is valuable. Refrain from discussing unrelated topics, unless they engage you specifically on these topics. Treat every reporter with courtesy and respect.

Be Honest

Don't try to conceal negative information; rather, let your interviewer know what you are doing to solve a problem.

Don't be Defensive

Avoid being defensive when asked a difficult question.

Be Careful

If you don't want something to be printed or aired, don't say it. Be on guard at all times. Never say anything you do not want to read in print, hear on the radio, or see on television or the Internet. Do remember that it is common practice for reporters to record conversations.

Avoid "Off the Record" Statements

Do not make "off the record" statements. You are never truly "off the record" with a reporter. Off the record comments are often seen as unattributed statements.

Never Say "No Comment"

Never say, "no comment." Instead, if you cannot or do not choose to answer, explain briefly. You can gracefully decline to answer a question; just offer a reason.

End Strongly

Make your final comment clear and concise, reemphasizing your main point. If you feel that you failed to get the message out, force it in at the end.

