
Media Training Resources



The Interviewee's "Bill of Rights"

Interviews will typically be scheduled through your communications team (work with deadlines).

Prepare yourself by working with the media relations team to ensure what information should be made public and what needs to stay internal.

Review talking points that the communications team provides and collaborate with them to create messaging that's appropriate for the media outlet's audience.

Step into the reporter's shoes and think of 5 questions you'll likely be asked and create a SET Format answer for each. Also, think of the one question you absolutely hope you will NOT get asked and prepare potential answers using the Blocking and Bridging Technique.

Secure All the Pertinent Details:

- Name of reporter & media outlet
- Which program or column
- Live or taped interview or Zoom
- Topic/Focus of story
- Who will phone who (and back-up phone number)
- Anticipated length of interview If possible, if anyone else will be interviewed
- Make a list of the top 5 questions you think you'll be asked and use SET format
- Remember - they need YOU. You are the expert. You are in control of the interview
- Follow up on where/when the story runs on broadcast and online and save a copy

"What questions do you have for my answers?"

Blocking & Bridging Technique

An experienced media spokesperson will be the first to admit that interviews with journalists aren't always easy. When reporters try to get to the bottom of a story, they might ask some difficult, untargeted or premature questions. A journalist could be confrontational, unprepared or perhaps the conversation simply goes on a tangent. Regardless, when being interviewed you might not want or know how to respond to questions in a way that's beneficial to UNC Health and maintains credibility.

So how can spokespeople participate in a media interview, without seeming uncommunicative or uninformed? The classic block-and-bridge technique can steer the conversation toward more favorable, and often mutually beneficial, topics. Interviewees regularly use this technique to regain control over the direction of the interview and to ensure their message gets across as intended. While blocking and bridging is certainly helpful when an interview gets confrontational, it may be used in myriad situations. Any interviewee can keep this tactic in their back pocket to avoid PR headaches down the road.

Block First

Blocking doesn't mean completely ignoring the journalist's question and jumping into defensive mode. That could one, frustrate the journalist and therefore put your media relationship at risk, and two, makes you look inexperienced or worse, suspicious. A journalist can easily detect evasiveness, and it might make them push even harder.

A successful block starts with acknowledging the question. A brief acknowledgment of the question lets the reporter know you heard and understand what they're asking. This is then followed by an appropriate transition. There are numerous statements a speaker can use to smoothly redirect the conversation. Through this technique, a spokesperson is able to maintain a friendly rapport while regaining control over the conversation.

A few tried-and-true blocking options include:

- "Thank you for bringing that up, however, it's also important to emphasize..."
 - "That is an important point and it also speaks to a bigger issue which is..."
 - "That is one way to think about it. Another way is..."
 - "That is not my area of expertise, but I can tell you..."
 - "It's our policy not to discuss XYZ, but what I can tell you is..."
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Blocking & Bridging (continued)

Then, Build a Bridge

Follow a successful block with a bridge: introduce a topic that more closely aligns with the message you and/or UNC Health is trying to send. Instead of stumbling through an excuse in response to the journalist's difficult, untargeted or tangential question, treat this as an opportunity to showcase some of the positive aspects of what UNC Health does or has accomplished.

To continue the metaphor, arrive on the other side of your bridge with confidence – it might be the perfect moment to connect with the outlet's target audience with an interesting story or statistic.

In any case, ensure you're prepared for hard questions ahead of every interview.

Loaded Question:

Q: "How much damage has his allegation done to your company?"

A: "With respect, I don't agree with your premise. In fact,..."

OR A: "The issue that's important here is..."

Bait Question:

Q: "Do you think the company is being greedy?"

A: "What I would say is that we're competitive."

Personal Opinion:

Q: "What about your personal opinion?"

A: "This issue is really about the organization's position on..."

Speaking on Behalf of Others:

Q: "Why do you think the city decided to do that?"

A: "You'd have to ask the city that."

Don't Know the Answer:

Q: "How much did that cost?"

A: "I'm not sure off-hand. I will get that information for you."

Getting Boxed In:

Q: "Are you going to increase funding or maintain the status quo?"

A: "Our goal is to provide quality service."

Know the Answer but Aren't Allowed to Say:

Q: "What was the amount of the offer?"

A: "I'm not in a position to say because:

That information is confidential

The issue is before the courts

The issue is currently under discussion/ review/investigation

Emotionally Loaded or Hostile Question:

Q: "Aren't you just strangling the customer?"

A: "No. While customers will be paying more for this service, the benefits to them are..."

Hostile but Some Truth to It:

Q: "Why did you fail to meet the deadline and thus destroy your credibility?"

A: "We have actually negotiated a new delivery date and are confident that..."

Persistent Questioning:

Q: "...then why don't you just reveal the strategy?"

A: "As I mentioned, the strategy is in place ready to go and we'll announce it at the appropriate time. [So, with all due respect, it's pointless to go over the same ground again.]"

Open-Ended/Vague Question:

Q: "Tell me about your organization."

A: "What specific aspect are you interested in?" OR A: "Our organization is committed to..."

Hypothetical Question:

Q: "What will you do if you don't reach an agreement?"

A: "I wouldn't want to speculate, what I can tell you is..."

Rumor:

Q: "There's a rumor that other unions may be interested in applying for certification?"

A: "It would be inappropriate to respond to rumors; we'll deal with that issue if and when it arises."

Multi-Part Question:

Q: "What impact will the changes have...and will you be able to continue to...at the same time or will you have to...?"

A: "Let me begin with your first question. The changes will make us more efficient and more responsive to the public. With regard to the question of..."

Sympathetic Approach:

Q: "I guess it must be really tough on you with all of the problems your organization is facing?"

A: "Our organization is [insert what the organization is doing]..."

Ready... SET... Go

Rather than fill your head with models and charts on how to put together your message, there's a basic formula that's helpful. Whether it's preparing an elevator speech, a Q&A, a panel or a 45-minute keynote, or a media interview, we like to use the SET format.

S	E	T
Solution, Statement or Short Answer	Evidence supporting that answer or statement	Transition made by summarizing & reinforcing the statement

S= Statement or Short answer is what you lead with. It sums up the message, the one thing you want the audience/viewer to leave knowing. What is the one thing you hope the audience/viewer leaves knowing?

E= Evidence or examples explaining that answer. Here you can list three, possibly five, examples to support your message.

T= Transition. By transition, we mean you summarize your message and close your statement or presentation, possibly with a call to action.

Example:

"The UNC basketball team is the best college team in America.

They have the fastest point guard in the country, this team has more experience playing in big games than their competition, and they have the most talented starting 5 of any other team. These are just a few reasons I believe the Tar Heels are the best in the country."

(Optional: Do you agree?)

Take Away:

This is a very basic use of the SET formula. Any one of the 3 points can be expanded on... but in that elevator speech situation you have the concept.

The S-E-T Formula Worksheet

Use this column to make notes and brainstorm the steps of S-E-T. Answer the questions and follow the instructions in each section.

Use this column to make bullet points for each section. This will be what you actually say in your S-E-T statement or answer.

What is the answer to the question or what is the statement?

Short answer/statement:

What are three points that support the basic answer or statement?

Evidence:

Summarize how the evidence supports your statement or answer, and, if appropriate, decide what statement you'll use to move the conversation back to the other person.

Transition/Conclusion:

Crisis Communications 101

A crisis is a situation that strains an organization's reputation, leadership, integrity and loyalty.

People - The team involved in managing crisis communications should be fully briefed on who might contact them in the event of a crisis.

Roles and Tasks - Have a checklist of what role each team member will fulfill during the crisis and what tasks they are assigned when a crisis breaks. Suggested roles include briefing members of the board; internal communications and keeping staff informed; media relations and media monitoring; on-line monitoring;

Messages - Work out in advance what key messages you will communicate in a crisis. Don't bother with corporate messages about vision statements. Journalists are not interested in these. Think about which messages you want to get across that journalists will realistically write about.

Draft Statements and Responses - Having templates prepared ahead of time can help you turn around information quickly when a crisis occurs. Have background facts and Q&A sheets ready to hand out. Develop your "Buy Time Statement."

Speed - You need speedy response, but also speed of thinking and action to be in control of the situation rather than panicking to catch up with the media. You want to run the pace of the story your way having the media respond to you rather than the other way around.

Control - Work out how you will take control of the story for each likely scenario. The plan should identify media trained spokespeople who can represent your company in a crisis. Have some ready prepared images available. If you don't, the media will look elsewhere to fill the gap.

Practice - Teams need to be familiar with the crisis communications plan. Practice a mock situation twice a year.

Crisis Communications Basic Check List

Never say "No Comment"

- Give as much information with compromising investigation
- Always follow up if you say you will
- Take control even in negative situations

Develop a "Buy Time" Statement

- Acknowledge the situation
 - Show concern
 - Give status
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Vocal Delivery and Body Language

Vocal Delivery

Breathing:

When we get nervous we tend to speed up our delivery. The more we speed up, the less we breathe. We find ourselves speaking from the throat instead of from the diaphragm. It's calming to breathe from our diaphragm. You can't separate your voice from the rest of your body.

Breathy-Tense • Flat-Thin • Nasal-Denasal • Frontal-Throaty

Volume:

People associate a strong voice with confidence. A weak voice ... a lack of confidence. Speak up. Don't yell, don't scream, just speak up.

Inflection:

Can you imagine some of the most amazing speeches of our time delivered in a monotone voice? Strive for diversity in your inflection. You may feel like you are going over the top, chances are you sound engaging. Downward inflection, ending your sentences in a downward cadence indicates authority.

Pacing and Tempo:

Listen to amazing orators. Notice they take their time, articulate their thoughts, and they pause. They are able to make words and statistics stand out.

Eliminate "Vocal Graffiti":

ums, like, kinda - all things that muddy the message. This includes qualifiers like, "maybe" and "you know" and "so" and "well."

Use the Pause:

- Gives people time to absorb what you just said
 - It creates anticipation
 - Allows you time to think about what you'll say next
 - By using a pause it helps you avoid fillers or vocal graffiti
 - It relieves tension
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Body Language:

- Is your posture straight whether standing or sitting?
- Are your gestures natural and unforced?
- Are your body movements fluid and comfortable?
- Are you smiling when appropriate?

The eyes have it:

- Darting eyes can make people nervous.
- Staring at people for too long can make them uncomfortable.
- Three to five seconds is fine to look before moving on the next person.

Gestures:

- Keep your hand gestures above your waist.
- Remember, forced gestures look worse than none.

Avoid:

- Rocking
- Swaying
- Fidgeting
- Jangling pocket change or jewelry
- Adjusting your hair or clothing
- Leaning on a podium

Your "Friendlies":

- Identify ahead of time your "friendlies," colleagues who will be engaged and enthusiastic during your presentation and will show positive non-verbal communication throughout.
 - Place your friendlies around the room so you can "work the room" during your presentation and feel comfortable by looking at your colleagues should you need positive reinforcement.
 - Be a "friendly" for your colleagues when they are presenting.
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How to Dress For On-Camera Presentations & Television

Dressing in business attire is always safe.

Being overdressed or underdressed will divert the audience's attention. You do not want the focus of the interview on what you are wearing rather than on what you are pitching. Keep your audience in mind. Is your interview on a daytime show whose audience is generally female, age 25 to 65, or are you being interviewed on a Sunday talk show that focuses on national and international current events and attracts men and women? Dress appropriately and you will not only look good, but also fit in with the host, set, and viewers.

Where will you be?

Studio lights generate a lot of heat, so it will probably be hot on the set. If you are dressed too warmly and have to remove your jacket, you are going to look less like an expert.

What kind of microphone will you be using?

Might a microphone be clipped to your clothing? If a woman wears a blouse and no blazer, jacket, or cardigan, the weight of the microphone may pull on her blouse and be distracting. The same is true for a man wearing a polo shirt with no tie. Blazer collars and ties are typical places for the audio team to clip a microphone. Note that tie clips and necklaces can create a lot of noise if the microphone bangs against them. Swishy fabrics can also create noise problems.

Wear "Jewel Tones."

Despite what you may think, it is good to wear colors. Black and white look dull on camera, especially in this age of HDTV, where colors practically jump off the television screen. Jewel tones are vibrant blues, green, red, purple, orange, etc. There is a long-standing debate about whether men should wear white shirts; light blue is worn just as often. If you watch the Sunday-morning talk shows, you'll see that almost every male interviewed wears a navy blue suit, white or light blue shirt, and red tie. The interviewers are a little less cookie-cutter in their appearance. Navy is always a winner, but so are red, yellow, and even pink. Avoid wild color combinations.

Avoid busy patterns.

Patterns to avoid are plaids, checks, polka dots, and busy geometrics. These all tend to read bizarrely on camera. You may have seen someone being interviewed, or even a host or an anchor, whose tie or blouse seems to move because the pattern is too busy.

Style of Tops/Shirts.

Try to wear a v-neck blouse or blazer. It makes you look thinner and elongates your torso. TV adds about ten pounds. If you wear a turtle neck or high collar, it makes your neck disappear and tends to make you look wider.

Overall Style.

Do not select your television wardrobe based on what is in fashion, but don't wear something that hasn't been in vogue for 30 years (although it does seem that every fashion trend of the past 40 years has had a rebirth). It is better to be conservative with on-camera clothes than to be too far out there.

Accessories.

As with your clothing, make sure your jewelry or accessories are not overpowering. Metallic jewelry really shines under those lights (think about someone abandoned at sea using a mirror to attract a rescue plane). If your accessories are huge, your face will disappear, and the noise your jewelry makes will annoy the audio team. Avoid heavy chains on the neck and wrist. If you have a huge diamond ring, turn it around during the interview. Sparkling diamonds can be a distraction. Avoid large earrings—they could get in the way of your earpiece if you are being interviewed by remote instead of in-studio. Men, wear a tie, not an ascot or cravat, unless that is really the way you dress.

Style of Pants/Skirts.

Women, make sure your skirt or dress will cover everything if you cross your legs during a seated interview. Wear new panty hose to ensure that there are no runs on the verge of spreading up your leg. Men, wear long socks. If you are being interviewed on a “living room” set, no one wants to see skin above your socks. Be sure that your socks either match or compliment your shoes and pants. Test outfits beforehand, if time permits. Wearing what you intend to wear, have someone take a cell phone photo of you sitting or standing, depending on which you will be doing during your interview. Then, share the photo with people who can give you an honest opinion of how you look and be prepared to accept what you are told, even if it is not what you want to hear.

Travel considerations.

If you are traveling by plane or train to your interview destination, do not wear your interview apparel on the way. You don't want to be on camera sporting a huge coffee stain, broken heel, ripped jacket, or run in your hose.

Manage your makeup.

Even men should wear at least a little bit of face powder to tone down a damp or ruddy complexion. Under hot studio lights, it doesn't take long to break out in a sweat. The networks have makeup professionals on staff to help reduce the shine, but if your interview is in a small market, you won't have a makeup artist to help you, so carry a small compact to lightly coat your eyelids, cheekbones, forehead, and nose. Men, if you are bald or you have a receding hairline, apply powder on your head as well. A small amount will drastically improve your look—greasy and shiny is definitely not attractive. Before applying the powder, use a paper towel to soak up any moisture. Be conservative with eye makeup. Women, you don't want to look like a vampire with dark black circles under the eyes, or like a deer in the headlights because eye shadow that's too light gives you a wide-eyed look. You will need to wear a slightly heavier eye shadow, liner, and mascara than you normally would, but not too heavy. And don't forget to tone it down before you leave the studio after your interview.

Anchor Man's Pro Tip.

To avoid looking scrunched-up and messy while seated, pull the back of your blazer or jacket down and sit on it; this is one of the tricks of the trade. Then ask the studio people to tell you if you've done it right.
