

October 2014

Media Training: Tracy Ellig, MSU Communications, 406-994-5607, tellig@montana.edu

Tips on a successful media interview from Tripp Frohlichstein of Media Masters, Saint Louis, MO
Tr3@aol.com or 314-822-8889:

Think positive. An interview is an opportunity.

To Relax: Breathe deeply or make tight fists and count to 10, then release slowly.

Just Before Your Interview: Make a last minute check of your personal appearance.

Interview Reminders:

Know your central message, the one you can always return to.

Reminder that your audience is thinking “What’s in it for me?” WIIFM

Be honest.

Show your pride.

Don’t be defensive.

Stay calm in the face of tough questions.

Keep your answers short.

Tell stories or use analogies.

Avoid jargon.

Use an expressive face.

Sit up straight, leaning slightly forward.

Use gestures.

Maintain good eye contact with the interviewer.

Avoid saying “no comment” or going “off the record”

Tips on from the Center for Disease Control adapted for non-crisis situations:

Acknowledge uncertainty

Tell the truth. Be transparent.

Stay within your scope of expertise. Don’t speculate.

Pivots: How to stay on message with a difficult question:

I don’t know the answer to that, but what’s important to remember is ...

I can’t answer that question, but I can tell you ...

Before I forget, I want to tell your viewers ...

Let me put that in perspective ...

Miscellaneous tip:

It’s common for interviewers to end the interview with “Is there anything I should have asked you that I haven’t.” The vast majority of the time, interview subjects say no – possibly out of fatigue. This is an opportunity. Don’t pass it up. Take a deep breath. Pause a moment, collect your thoughts and repeat your main message again as clearly, forcefully, succinctly and articulately as you can.

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Tips from Tracy Ellig:

A media interview is not the same as teaching. You do not have an entire semester with a reporter. You have 10 minutes at most. Often you only have 1 minute. You are not trying to help a reporter “discover” something through critical thinking.

Accuracy can become “the curse of knowledge.” You can become so accurate that no one understands – or remembers – what you’ve said. Remember, the vast majority of people you’re communicating with are neither in your field, nor doctorates.

At the university level, everyone doing science is like an Olympic athlete, say on Olympic marathoner. If you wanted someone to participate and be excited in a marathon you would not take them on an Olympic-level training run their first day. We all must crawl first, then walk, then run. It is the same with understanding science. Most of the people your talk to will be crawling. Respect that. Be kind. Help them. Get them excited enough to start walking.

Sometimes, successfully communicating the importance and benefits of science to the public requires not letting the perfect be the enemy of the good. A perfect description of a scientific process often frustrates your goal, which is to get people EXCITED about science. We’re not trying to make people into Ph.Ds, we’re trying to get them to appreciate and be excited by science so they may take the next step.

Most research done at universities is funded by the taxpayer. Why wouldn’t you speak in a way the average tax payer can understand? The taxpayer is paying for your salary, your laboratory, and your lab technicians. It is reasonable to expect the public would like to know what you’re doing with their money in a way they can understand.

Recommended reading and listening:

Book: “Made to Stick: Why Some Ideas Survive and Others Die” by Chip Heath and Dan Heath, Random House.

Website: www.threeminutethesis.org Research communication competition developed by The University of Queensland.

Great science story telling that is free on iTunes or the web: Radiolab with Robert Krulwich and Jad Abumrad at www.radiolab.org or on iTunes. See the NYTimes story about them appeared in the April 7, 2011 magazine.

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Media Training: Phone interviews

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The phone rings.

THE REPORTER: "Hello Dr. Smith, my name is JohnDoe and I'm a reporter with the Daily News. I'd like to ask you a few questions about xyz for a story I'm working."

YOU: "I'm sorry, but I didn't catch your name. Can you spell it for me?"

"And if you don't mind, I'd like to ask you a few questions first:

What's the name of your publication?

What is the story you're working on?

Why do you want to talk to me?

What's your deadline?

Who else are you visiting with about this topic?

What's your phone number and email address?

Can I call you back in a few minutes?

Hand up and pursue one of these options:

Call Tracy Ellig or Carol Schmidt in MSU Communications for some advice at 994-5607 or 994-1966 respectively **OR**

Write down the one main point you hope the journalists gets from the interview. Try to summarize that point in 25 words or less, which is around the average length of a quote in a newspaper or a clip on TV.

Define your terms so they could be understood by the lay public.

Answer these questions: What's in it for my audience? Why should they care about what I'm doing? What's the relevance/implications of my work?

Practice your answers out loud. If you're going to do a TV interview standing up, then stand up and practice.

Roughly 90 percent of all interviews will end with this question: "Is there anything else I should have asked you or that we should cover?" **NEVER, EVER LET THIS QUESTION GO UNANSWERED.** Always, take this opportunity to restate your main point.

Always offer the reporter a chance to call you back to clarify or double check his/her story.

Other things to consider:

Before doing the interview, check in with your peers.

Don't speculate about things you shouldn't be speculating about.

Give credit where credit is due.

Reporters are human, very few take shorthand. Speak slowly, pauses frequently and use bite-sized thoughts.

Nothing is ever off the record.

Never disparage the media.