

# Preparing for Interviews

## General Tips

This tip sheet is meant to provide high-level, generic information that can help any election official give a calm, confident interview. You may get more information about what to do in crisis or time-sensitive situations, by referring to [10 Things to Do When the Media Comes Calling](#) and [Crisis Communications Toolkit for Before, During and After a Critical Elections Incident](#).

### Appearance

- **Wear solid colors.** Dark and jewel tones are best. Avoid patterns, all white, and shiny fabric.
- Choose clothes that **fit well** and make you feel confident.
- **Avoid flashy jewelry** or accessories (i.e., long earrings may be distracting if they move while you speak).
- Confirm with the photographer they have **good lighting**. Have a blank white sheet of paper handy to help photographer set “white balance” (a camera setting that allows colors to appear accurate and natural).

### Before the Interview

#### Messaging

- Identify **three key messages** you want to get across during the interview, and stick to those. Include data whenever possible.
- **Practice** the messages with a colleague, friend, or communications professional in your network.
- Do **mock interviews** or watch past interviews you’ve done to identify strengths and areas of improvement.
- Ask the reporter if there’s an angle they plan to take for this interview - i.e., whether it’s part of a bigger story.

#### Logistics

- If the interview is at your office, think of a few quiet locations with limited foot traffic where the crew can set up.
- Confirm the interview format with the reporter: length, how the station will use the footage, etc.
- Give yourself plenty of time to get comfortable with the environment and make any necessary adjustments. (microphone placement, camera angles, lighting, etc.)
- Do not sit in a chair that swivels or rolls on wheels.

### During the Interview

- Maintain eye contact: **look at the reporter**, not the camera.
- Deliver your messages **succinctly, comfortably, and in plain language - no jargon or acronyms**.
- Sit or stand upright. **Natural gestures are good!**
- Speak **clearly**. If you typically talk fast, slow down. The more rushed or under pressure you’re feeling, the more you should slow down.
- **Pause**...instead of using filler words like “um.” For a little extra time at the start of an answer, you may summarize the reporter’s question.
- **Avoid talking just to fill a silence**. If you finish answering, no need to continue speaking if reporter hasn’t asked another one yet.
- If the interview goes off track, it’s okay to politely steer the conversation back to your key messages.
- If the interview is not live, it’s okay to restart your answer.

### After the Interview

- **Watch the coverage**. If anything is inaccurate, unclear or misleading, reach out to the reporter to correct the information. However, a difference of opinion is not a basis to challenge a story.
- **Make notes** for yourself about ways to improve for the next time.

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### Additional Tips

- **Eight seconds** is the average length of a TV sound bite. Again, be succinct!
- **Talking to the media is talking to the public.** Use layman's terms. Avoid jargon and acronyms.
- Keep a **blouse or blazer in your office** in case you have an unexpected interview.
- Often, you and the reporter will go over questions before the interview - you may even answer some questions off-camera. During the real interview, **avoid phrases like "as I said earlier,"** because the viewer wasn't there.
- **Speak in complete sentences.** This is because the reporter's question may be edited out, especially in TV interviews.
- Remember: **you are the expert!** Speak confidently and avoid being defensive.

### Other Resources

- [Media Interview Tips](#). University of Kansas, Public Affairs
- [Seven Tips For A Successful Media Interview](#). Forbes Business Council. (February 2022)
- [A TV Journalist's Tips For A Great On-Camera Interview](#). Media Training Toronto. (April 2014)