

BEST PRACTICE GUIDE

SPEAKING TO THE MEDIA

Have you just been invited to speak to the media? Stay calm - here are our top tips for talking to the press and coming across as genuine and authoritative.

General tips

- Have some water handy in case your throat dries up.
- Don't use jargon – people won't understand and will stop listening. Find an alternative, more straightforward explanation.
- Leave the 'researcher' behind – imagine you are talking to your grandmother, or a secondary school student, not a peer.
- Relax – you'll sound more authentic if you treat the interview as a conversation rather than a recital.
- Prepare well – ask yourself the 'So what?' question and be prepared to answer it. The press office can help brief you on potential questions that might be asked
- Think about who you're speaking to: Different journalists have different styles and approaches. An interview on the Today programme is likely to differ from the type of interview you may get from big personality journalists on stations like LBC and Talk Radio
- Be clear and concise – Interviews tend to be only 4-5 questions so keep answers to about 30 seconds.
- If challenged, or asked a silly question, stay calm and provide evidence to support your point. Use the bridging technique (ABC) outlined below.
- If you are part of panel acknowledge/agree with points made by other guests and don't get argumentative or defensive if challenged. Stay calm, provide evidence.

Tips on interview preparation

- Focus on one key message. What is the one thing you want to get across? Make sure you say it early – the interview could be over before you know it. You can bring every answer back to it. The message should be simple and brief. It must be capable of being summarised in a single sentence of no more than 20 words, otherwise it is likely to be too complicated for people to remember.
- Use example(s) to support your point(s) – simple stats or analogies help people visualise your research and understand why it's relevant and important. Personal stories and metaphors are also useful for helping to illustrate your message.
- Be aware when being interviewed for print media that the reporter has the potential to quote you out of context. Don't repeat/agree with negative language or you could be quoted as having said it.
- The same applies for broadcast – repeating questions back to interviewers is good for getting your answers replayed in news bulletins and on social media, but be careful to avoid repeating negative phrases which could make you sound bad out of context.
- Prepare answers to any potential unrelated questions you might be asked, for example about something in the news at that time, the University or higher education more generally. The press office can help brief you on public statements.

In summary, think AMEN

- Audience – make it relevant to them;
- Message – what is it? Say it!
- Examples/evidence to support your message;
- Negatives – consider possible negative questions someone might ask and work out how you will handle them.

You will rarely get the chance to see the questions you will be asked before your interview. Many reporters want to speak to experts as quickly as possible. Contact the Press Office for guidance on what you might be asked.

For tricky questions and those outside your area, use the 'ABC' bridging technique

Answering questions that pull you away from the point you want to make can mean the interview is over before you've had chance to share your key message. However, not answering the question makes you seem untrustworthy.

If asked a question that isn't quite in your area of expertise, or is taking you away from your key message, then bridge back to it.

Acknowledge the question – "That's a very important part of the problem we're faced with right now..."

Bridge back to your area of expertise – "...but the bigger problem is this..."

Communicate your key message by providing an example or evidence to demonstrate your point – "...and this can be seen in XYZ."

Tricky questions are not always controversial ones – sometimes they are just unexpected. Sometimes presenters like to ask about topical or relevant news stories. You can use the ABC technique to navigate questions about unfamiliar topics, but it's best to be prepared and read up on what's in the news before your interview – this includes news related to the university.

Don't be afraid to answer silly questions either. Local radio presenters, for example, sometimes like to introduce you or end your interview with an unrelated, trivial question. This could be anything from your thoughts on the Britain's Got Talent winner, to your favourite biscuit or where is best for a roast dinner in Reading. Don't be shy – you're allowed to answer like a human and give your opinions.

Tips for television and other visual media

- Smile.
- Keep eye contact with interviewer, or look at their ear until you're sure the camera has moved on to something else. Looking around appears shifty or like you aren't sure of your information, and the camera often lingers on you for a few seconds after interview finishes.
- The same applies for online interviews. Look into your webcam, not around it.
- If seated, push your back into the back of the chair and sit up straight. If wearing a jacket pull it down behind you so it doesn't bunch up.
- Hold your hands loosely on your lap.
- If standing, hold a strong stance with your feet offset for stability.
- Imagine a cord on top of your head pulling you up straight and hold your hands together in front of you.
- Contact the [Press Office](#) if you'd like to practice a mock interview beforehand.