

Interview guidelines and preparing for interview

Guidelines

Should you do an interview?

Before agreeing to an interview, listen hard. Don't be flattered or pressured into an interview. Find out as much as you can. What's in it for you, the University and the public? You are entitled to basic information. **Here is a checklist:**

- Which station/programme/newspaper is the interview for?
- What sort of programme/publication is it?
- When will it be broadcasted/printed?
- Who watches/reads it?
- Who is the interview with and for how long?
- Who else is taking part?
- What does the interviewer want to discuss? (Question areas)
- For broadcast, is the interview live or recorded (edited)?
- Will the interview take place inside or outside? Your place, their studio, or somewhere else?

Journalists are skilled professionals who will try very hard to get the information they need. It is safest to assume that everything you say may be used.

If you are asked to do a media interview

Please always inform the press team if you have been asked to do a media interview (even if it is after you have done it). If you are unsure of whether or not to do the interview, we are happy to discuss it with you and provide advice.

If you are called out of the blue by a journalist

- ask what they want to talk to you about
- tell them you are busy and cannot discuss it right now
- agree a time when they can call you back

This gives you time to think and plan what to say. However, be aware that most journalists' deadlines are very short – hours rather than days.

Don't be flattered or bulldozed into an interview you don't feel comfortable doing. If you do wish to go ahead, here are some tips on how to handle the interview.

The key to a good interview is preparation

- Ask if the interview is live or pre-recorded
- Ask how long you will be on air
- Make a list of two or three positive points you wish to make
- Ask the interviewer what their first question will be
- Look the interviewer in the eye (even if you are on radio)
- Be enthusiastic and authoritative. Smile when appropriate (smiles can be heard!)
- Answer the question and then 'springboard' your positive points
- Tell the truth and don't be afraid to say, 'I don't know'. Use it as an opportunity to make your positive points by saying, 'But what I *do* know is'
- Avoid jargon or technical words – most people will have no background in your field
- Remain cool and always be polite
- Relax – don't sniff, rustle paper or jangle coins in your pocket

For TV specifically

- Dress smartly
- Check your appearance in a mirror beforehand
- If sitting, sit up, cross your legs and fold your hands loosely in front of you to start with, but feel free to use them to express yourself
- If standing, stand with your feet slightly apart and your weight evenly balanced between them
- Don't shuffle or move your body too much
- Look at the interviewer and not at the camera

Try to remember to say you are from the University of Bristol

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Preparing for interview

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The last thing you want is a question that startles you. The best interviews are carefully planned and rehearsed. Research shows that content accounts for just seven per cent of impact. The real impact is in the voice (38%) and, in the case of TV, looks (55%).

Time is the one thing you don't have in an interview. Your on-air contribution will be equal to the length of the item divided by the number of contributors divided by two (to allow for the

interviewer's introduction, questions and close). So if you are invited to a four-minute live debate on *Newsnight* with three others, you will have about 30 seconds.

Interview styles

Most common is a pre-recorded 'news' style interview on location. It will be felled into a couple of ten-second 'sound bites'.

'Remote' interviews, with you alone in a studio somewhere else, are widely used. They are often live and rarely more than 90-120 seconds long. **Focus** your eyes on the camera lens and pretend it's a person. **Look interested** throughout. **React**, nod and shake your head, just as you would in a normal interview.

Radio is different. Radio is a one-to-one conversation with a listener at home or in a car. With no pictures, all the listener has to judge you by is your voice. Radio interviews are usually conducted in a studio, down a telephone line, or by a reporter with a tape recorder. You may be interviewed in a radio car, especially for live news interviews. **Make sure you can hear the presenter.**

In a radio phone-in, you speak live to your key audience. You may have more airtime than usual, but phone-ins can be fraught with danger, especially if you are asked questions for which you are unprepared. It may be that the caller has a genuine grievance. You can always suggest that a point could be followed up after the show. **If you are in trouble, the presenter (usually) rescues you.**

Top tips

- Develop key messages (two will do)
 - Prepare a Q&A sheet, but don't 'learn' it
 - Talk over any tricky questions with colleagues beforehand
 - Assess the likely reaction of the target audience
 - Select lively examples to buttress your case
 - Arm yourself with 'gee whiz' facts/statistics
 - Practice by doing a dry run
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