In preparation for your interview, write down 3-5 points that you want to get across to the reporter. These may be the main findings of your study, or your thoughts on the issue that the reporter wants to talk about. This will be your touchstone for the interview and help you have an answer for every question you are asked.

Explain your research or expertise simply, without using jargon. Imagine you are explaining to an interested neighbor or family member who is not in your field. It is often helpful to use metaphors or visual comparisons that help the audience see the research in terms they are already familiar with.

Gain control of the interview. YOU can control an interview! Answer every question in a way that helps get across the 3-5 main points that you have prepared. Use these four techniques:

1) Nuggets: Make your answers brief. Anticipate the question and rehearse your answer. When you answer, make one or two of your best points. Then stop talking and wait for the next question. Stay on message. Be brief. Get to the point. Stop!

2) Bridging: Using a verbal bridge can help you overcome an obstacle in an interview and take you from a negative to a positive. Take a few seconds to address the question and then build the bridge that will take you to where you want to go in the interview.

For example, “I agree that we have a problem and I’d like to tell you about our solution.” Then state your key point. Another bridge could be: “We have our share of challenges, just like everyone else does, but it’s important to remember that ...”

3) Bump and Run: This is a bridging technique that is especially useful when an unprepared reporter asks a question that does not make a lot of sense or is unrelated to your research. Rather than just say you don’t know, bump the question with a quick answer and run to where you want to go. For example, “I don’t have all the facts to be able to answer that question accurately, but I can tell you ...” Then state one of your key points.

4) Turn the Tables: Pose a question and answer it yourself. “The real question here is, ‘What are we doing about the problem? Well, we have a plan in place that’ ...”

Get one positive statement into your answer to every question, because you don’t know which sound bite they will use. People tend to remember the last thing you say, so make it positive. When you are saying something positive, have a slight smile.
Handling tough questions and interviews

Most of the interviews you do will be straightforward and conflict-free. In most cases, reporters are just looking for a good story and are relying on you to provide it. They are more than happy to have you lead the way and provide the story that will capture the attention of their audience. But these guidelines will help you deal with tough situations.

- Avoid saying “No Comment” at all costs. The reporter will write the story with or without you and a “no comment” is often perceived negatively. If it is your policy not to comment on certain sensitive subjects, explain why you have that policy. If you need time to review a situation, tell the media and let them know when you may be prepared to comment. Use the “bridging” and “bump and run” techniques above and refer to your main points so that you always have a response.

- Make your own statement. If a reporter asks, “What would you say?” and then quotes a statement for your agreement or disagreement, don’t. Do not let anyone determine your agenda. “What if” questions are lures and dangerous. One cannot comment on the hypothetical as accurately as discussing known quantities. Instead, use your own question and answer it: “The question here is ... (then answer it)”

- Do not debate with a reporter or get into an argument. Use a vague response to a nasty question like, “That’s an interesting point of view, but let me tell you this ...”

- Do not babble. People tend to talk too much. That is when people get into the most trouble. It is usually not your answer that is bad, it is what you say when you ramble that will get you into trouble. Answer the question, and then stop!

- Do not volunteer bad information and do not lie, not even a little white lie.

PRESENTATION

- ENERGY. ENERGY. ENERGY.
- Stand/sit up straight
- Eye contact
- Smile
- Do not wear small stripes or small patterns, wear solid colors instead
- Keep asking yourself, “Am I engaging?” “Are they getting it?” Read your audience. ENERGY.

LINKS

- Scarlet Studio
- Ohio State News
- The Conversation
- AP Campus Insights

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