

# Tips to Talk to the Press



*A basic guide to speaking with members of the media*

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## Introduction

Talking to the press is one of the most powerful actions you can take to support your business or cause. Having a strong relationship with members of the press can get you all sorts of organic advertising, from press-release announcements to front-page blasts, driving an audience – and dollars – to your organization. We realize that speaking with a journalist or giving a statement to a newspaper can be intimidating. This helpful guide will teach you the basics of speaking confidently with the media.

## Best Practices

### General

**Everything you say is always on the record.** You can ask to say something off the record and, admittedly, it's a great way to build rapport with reporters and journalists. But you should always expect that every word you say to them is fair game to publish. Never say anything you're not willing to see in print the next day. (Some people test reporters by "disclosing" benign info off the record, to see if it's used anyway.)

- **Take a deep breath.** Being calm helps you keep a clear head – and a clear message.
- **Always be courteous.** Journalists have a tough, thankless job. Plus, it's a small world and politeness will carry you much further.
- **Strike while the iron is hot.** When a representative of the media reaches out, always call or email them back promptly. Reporters are running on tight deadlines and can't wait long for a reply.
- **Do your homework.** Make sure that the media outlet has been researched by you or your team before any contact is made. The outfit should be reputable and align with your values.
- **Make a decision.** Commit to an interview or decline politely, but don't leave them hanging.
- **Zip the lip.** Don't volunteer any information until you are 100% ready to share it with the world.
- **Keep it simple.** Help the reporter to quote you accurately by using brief, direct talking points. Long, complex sentences will be edited down – and not always in your favor.
- **Be positive.** Avoid slandering or complaining about others. Even if you are addressing a problematic issue, be solution oriented and hopeful. Remember, you want to be a hero, not a villain.
- **Stay on script.** Prepare three to five short talking points before scheduling a call or email exchange with a reporter – and then stick to those talking points!

- **Insulate yourself.** Consider hiring a skilled press-relations consultant or firm. They can field inquiries and contact the media on your behalf – and help you avoid any unfortunate remarks.
- **Enunciate.** Articulate your words, speaking clearly and at a normal speed. Avoid “like” as a crutch.
- **Pause.** Silence is your friend. If you tend to use “um” as a filler, practice taking a pause instead.

## Radio / Podcasts

- **Be good to the host.** Memorize your interviewer’s name and thank them at the end of your segment.
- **Loosen up.** Listeners enjoy a relaxed, entertaining speaker. But still stay on message and on brand.
- **Mind your body.** Sit up straight or, if possible, stand. Good posture helps you breathe more easily, have more air in your lungs, and speak more clearly.
- **Smile.** People can hear when you’re smiling while you talk and it puts the audience in a better mood. (Obviously, skip this one if it’s a serious or somber topic!)
- **Use your words.** Listeners hear only *what* you say, not *how* you say it, so don’t rely solely on facial expressions or gesticulations to get your message across.
- **Take a break.** Be prepared to be interrupted by your interviewer. Practice your talking points so you know where you left off or how to get back on topic.

## TV / Video

- **Be good to the host.** Memorize your interviewer’s name and thank them at the end of your segment.
- **Keep it down.** If you’re going to be mic’d up, avoid anything that might hit it or make noise.
- **Be catchy.** Speak in sound bites, whenever possible. These clips are most likely to be used.
- **Be camera-ready.** Never wear green unless you want to become your own green screen, and avoid stripes, herringbone, and other patterns that can cause a sort of strobing effect.
- **Dress to impress.** Dress in a clean, classic, comfortable outfit – one that’s “you.” Avoid ornate clothing, distracting accessories, and flashy jewelry, they often don’t translate well on camera.

## Newspapers / Websites

- **Slow down.** Speak a little slower than normal. If you have an especially important or strong point to make, you might pause right after so the reporter has time to capture what you said.
- **Proof yourself.** Ask the interviewer if you can proof the article before it goes out. That way you can clarify any quotes they may put in for you.

*Need help to improve your speaking or PR skills? Contact [Info@421.group](mailto:Info@421.group) to learn more.*