

MEDIA INTERVIEW 101

CONGRATULATIONS! YOU SCORED AN INTERVIEW! WHAT DO YOU NEED TO KNOW TO BE PREPARED?

BASIC TIPS FOR ANY INTERVIEW

- **Reach out to UCM and let them know you have an interview** if they did not schedule it for you.
- **Be sure to research the media outlet and the interviewer you are working with** to get an idea what they might be asking. You can even ask the media outlet/reporter if they have any specific questions or information you should be prepared to answer.
- **Think about what your audience wants to know** and how to explain your research/event/news in basic language.
- **Consider - what is the headline you would like to see for your story? How can you develop your talking points to support that?**
- **Prepare/develop three main bullet points to share.** Break down talking points – what are the most important things you want people to know? Use these to stay on message. That doesn't mean saying the same answer each time, but having several different ways of saying the same thing, with some concrete examples that demonstrate your points. This will make your media interview interesting and engaging.
- **Practice your answers!** Work on not saying filler words like, “umm ...”, “you know” and others.
- **Before the interview begins, ask when it will air/go to print.** If it is live, ask if they are recording it and how to access it. Do not ask to see the story before it airs. It's typical newsroom policy to not let sources see a draft or final version of a story before it prints. This has to do with the First Amendment (Freedom of the Press) and Prior Restraint.
- **Tell the reporter/news outlet the spelling and proper pronunciation of your name along with your title.**
- **If you're not comfortable with how you answered a question, say so and restate your answer.**
- **If there's a question you don't feel comfortable answering, that's OK.** You can simply tell the reporter that particular question doesn't fall under your expertise, or you can look into the question and send a response later in the day. You can go further and say, “But what I do know is ____.”
- **Do not hesitate to correct inaccurate statements if the reporter makes them.**
- **Always assume *everything* you say is on the record.** If you think a piece of information shouldn't be published, don't say it.
- **Remember you are representing The University of Akron.** If you think what you are saying may reflect negatively on the University, don't say it. Clearly identify your own personal opinions as such.
- **Be sure to mention The University of Akron and/or your college, school, department, etc.**
- **Say thank you and offer to be a source in the future.** Let the reporter know they can follow-up with you after the interview with other questions.
- **Only answer the questions that are asked.** Do not take the interview in another direction by going off topic.
- **Know that UCM is available to help you prepare for any interview.** Please provide as much advance notice as possible if you require assistance.

RADIO INTERVIEWS

- **Ask if it is live or recorded.** Some radio interviews are live (meaning they will air as you speak) and some are recorded to air later. It is important to know which one it will be. Unlike a live interview, a recorded interview will allow you to start over or restate something, if needed.
- **Always call in at least 5 minutes in advance for a phone interview or arrive 15 minutes in advance for an in-person interview.**
- **If you are on the phone, it is still important to smile or show expression** like you would when speaking in person. Be sure to use your normal hand gestures as well. You are carrying on a conversation and expression on your face and body will translate to expression in your voice.
- Because you are not being seen by the radio audience, you can keep notes with you. **Use note cards**, if needed, as shuffling papers can be picked up on the microphone. This is where your bullet points come in handy. But practice saying them so you don't sound robotic.
- **Expect your host to be unprepared.** Even when we send notes ahead of time, the host often doesn't read them because they are short on time.
- **When asked a question, repeat the question in your answer, even if it appears to be a yes/no answer.** This is helpful if the interview is edited. Example: Reporter: Why is this research important? Response: This research is important because it shows how cells replicate quickly.
- **Don't talk too quickly.** Talking slowly and clearly can help to emphasize the points you want to make and reinforces credibility. It gives you more time to think and the journalist more time to write notes.
- If you are doing a phone interview from home or the office, be sure to **go into a quiet room with the door shut and turn off other electronics or things that can make noise.**
- **When speaking, practice pausing and speak in sound bites.** Don't drone on with long answers. Share what you know in short spurts. Some interviews are edited, so speaking in short answers helps to ensure your thought isn't edited partway through.
- **Keep water on hand in case you need a drink.**
- **If by the end of the interview the host has not mentioned your website URL/how to apply/purchase, etc., jump in and say, "By the way, listeners can apply at uakron.edu/research."**
- **Only answer the questions that are asked.**
- **When you think the interview is over, don't hang up or talk "off script" until someone tells you it is over and thanks you.**

PRINT INTERVIEWS

- **Print interviews can be done in person or on the phone or via an online meeting tool such as Zoom, Teams or Skype.** Although the reporter should ask for permission, you should assume that they will be recording your interview. Be sure to download the proper software or app before your scheduled interview time.
- Because it is a print interview, **you can keep notes with you.** This is where your bullet points come in handy.
- **You can go into detail on your topic** with a print reporter but try to keep it interesting. Don't drone on too long.
- **Keep water on hand in case you need a drink.**
- **Be sure to let the interviewer know how readers can find out more info/sign up, etc.**
- **Let the interviewer lead.** If they seem to want you to talk more, talk more. If they sound impatient and keep interrupting, be more concise.
- **Don't talk too quickly.** Talking slowly and clearly emphasizes the points you want to make and reinforces credibility. It gives you more time to think and the journalist more time to write notes.
- **Don't let the journalist put words in your mouth.** For example, "Your industry is in a terrible mess, wouldn't you agree?" If you don't disagree, the article might suggest you agree. So, listen carefully to what they say and if they ask a question in that format, say "I'm not sure I agree with that entirely. What I think is..."
- **Don't ask to review the article.** The answer likely will be no. This has to do with the First Amendment (Freedom of the Press) and Prior Restraint.
- **No such thing as off the record.** Don't say anything ever that you wouldn't want to appear in print.
- **If by the end of the interview the reporter has not mentioned your website URL/how to apply/purchase, etc., jump in and say, "By the way, listeners can apply at uakron.edu/research."**
- **Only answer the questions that are asked.**
- **When you think the interview is over, don't talk "off script."** Anything you say can end up in the article.

TV INTERVIEWS

- **TV Interviews can be done in studio, on location or via an online meeting tool such as Zoom, Teams or Skype.** Be sure to download the proper software or app before your scheduled interview time and connect to the call at least 5 minutes before your scheduled interview.
- If you are in control of the location, **be sure to take a good look at your location and make sure everything visible is what you are comfortable showing on camera.** Clean clutter out of the background, remove family photos, etc. Be sure there is minimal background noise.
- **Dress in plain clothing.** Patterns render oddly on screen and distract attention from what you're saying. Instead, opt for solid colors.
- **Keep accessories to a minimum.** Stay away from too much jewelry or makeup that is too bold. Your goal is to look good on screen without going overboard or detracting from your message.
- **If you are on set and they offer makeup – say yes.** The lighting in some rooms can make you look pasty or shiny. The station knows best.
- Most interviews are recorded and edited into a story. Even if you're interviewed for 10 minutes, the news channel will likely edit it down to just a minute or two. **So keep your comments succinct, and work on developing sound bites that will leave viewers associating you with your message.**
- You'll likely be nervous during your interview but strive not to let it show. Maintain eye contact with your interviewer and avoid glancing at the camera. Keep your hand gestures to a minimum.
- **Practice in the mirror.** You want to look friendly.
- **Look at the person asking you questions and respond looking at them. Do not look at the camera.**
- **When asked a question, repeat the question in your answer, even if it is a yes or no answer.** This is helpful when the piece is edited. Example: Reporter: Why is this research important? Response: This research is important because it shows how cells replicate quickly.
- **Don't talk too quickly.** Talking slowly and clearly emphasizes the points you want to make and reinforces credibility.
- **When speaking, practice pausing and speak in sound bites.** Don't drone on with long answers. Share what you know in short spurts.
- **If by the end of the interview the host has not mentioned your website URL/how to apply/purchase, etc., jump in and say, "By the way, viewers can apply at uakron.edu/research."**
- **Only answer the questions that are asked.**
- **When you think the interview is over, don't talk "off script" about your topic.** Always act as if the reporter's recording equipment is on. You wouldn't want them recording any embarrassing or inappropriate statements.

ONLINE MEETING INTERVIEWS

- Review the television interview advice above.
- **Make sure your computer is plugged in.**
- **Prior to the scheduled interview, make sure you have the proper streaming platform such as Zoom, Teams or Skype.** Be sure to download the proper software or app before your scheduled interview time and connect to the call at least 5 minutes before your scheduled interview.
- While on an online call, **look into the camera when speaking, do not look at the person you are talking with.**
- **Use your natural background** – not a blur or pre-programmed location background. Keep your background free of clutter, family photos, etc.
- **Find a brightly lit room that is quiet.**
- **Silence your phone and turn off notifications from your phone and computer.**
- **Use a desktop or laptop computer rather than your cell phone.**
- If sitting in a chair, sit still (no swinging the chair) and sit on the edge of your seat. Don't lean back. If standing, stand still. For both, consider your body language and the use of your hands. Hand gestures are okay if they are not too large and distracting.

