



Working with the Media: Types of Interviews

Two types of story approaches

Reactive stories are those that come to a communications office from a reporter about a specific subject. Sometimes these requests come out of nowhere (the reporter has picked up on an idea and is looking for someone—they don't know who, they just know the subject area); other times, the “story of the day” has an expert component to it, or they've followed up on something they've read or researched and are looking for a specific academic. In these cases, the media is usually working under a fairly tight timeline, and they expect to get a turnaround on their request fairly quickly.

Proactive stories, on the other hand, are the ones where the academic and the academic unit have some control; together, a decision is made on what the story is, when it should run (timing-wise), and there is room to prepare advance documents and outreach to the media to get the story out. Of course, this is preferable, but not always possible.

Types of interviews

There are two basic types of interviews: **live & taped**. A **live** interview goes to air as it is happening (with very slight delay) and is essentially run in its entirety (although pieces of it may be used later), while a **taped** interview can be used whole or edited for time and content later. In live interviews, there are no “do-overs,” whereas with a taped interview, the subject can pause (to cough or to think or to restate a response) and can even ask to start an answer again.

- **TIP: never hesitate to ask to start again if you don't like the way your answer is going during a taped interview!**

Radio interviews are either held over the telephone (called a “**phoner**”) or **live in studio**. Both can be edited, unless the program is going live over the air (and the guest will be informed of that before interview begins).

- **TIP: For a phoner, do not use a cell phone or other wireless device for an interview as signal quality can be poor or can drop in and out; if you must go wireless, do not drive, walk, or otherwise move from one place to the next while doing the interview. Plan to be in a quiet space in which you are comfortable; this will allow you to organize your thoughts more clearly.**

The physical space of a radio studio will most likely contain a table separating you from the host, and a series of microphones and headsets. The host will usually look directly at you while doing the interview; you should focus on speaking directly to that person. You will most likely be asked if you would like to don a pair of headphones; the sound will be quite different and you may need to get used to the sound of your own voice, but it will be much clearer if you choose to use the headphones. That said, you will be able to hear the interview whether you wear the headphones or not. A live studio interview can be as short as four or five minutes, or as long as an hour; there may also be a phone-in component, where listeners can call in with questions.

You may record a lengthy radio interview, to find that only a 7 to 10 second sound bite is used in a newscast. In other cases, you may find that your entire interview is utilized.

- **TIP: Make sure to clarify what is expected before you begin. Ask about format, length, whether there will be a phone-in, or any other details you feel you’ll need to know.**

Television interviews can be **taped in the field or in the studio**; they can be **conducted live in the field (via satellite trucks) and live in studio**. In-studio sessions will be similar to those on radio: one or two interviewers will ask you questions and you will talk to that person (do not look at the cameras; instead, focus on the host). The studio will be equipped with large cameras. In the field, you will face a camera and (usually) a reporter; most often the camera will be offset and you will again look at the interviewer when answering their questions. Note that journalists are increasingly using cell phone and other small devices to conduct interviews.

In television there is also an interview known as a “**double-ender**,” during which the interview guest does not see an interviewer, as that person is in another location. In this instance, the guest is given an earpiece with which to hear the interviewer, and is directed to look into the camera and speak to it as if answering the interviewer’s questions. This can be a little disconcerting at first, but you will become more comfortable as the interview goes along.

- **TIP: In a double-ender interview, think of the activity as a telephone conversation where you do not look away from the camera.**

Television stories are delivered in several ways: you might find that your story is presented as video, with copy being read by the announcer over background footage of your story (this is called a “voice-over” and the video is known as “b-roll”); it can be a “clip” of your comment with some copy read by the announcer (this is called a “voice-over-clip”); or it might appear as a full story by a reporter.

Print interviews can take place over the phone or in person, in a newsroom or any location where the guest happens to be. Because of the relative luxury of space in print publications, longer quotes can be used. Often a reporter will tape an interview. The guest is welcome to do the same if he/she feels it necessary/desired.

- **TIP: Remember that when all is said and done, if the interview is taped, your answers can be chopped down into ten second “clips,” so what you say (or don’t say) is crucial.**