

# Interview Dos and Don'ts

## What to do during an interview:

- DO “flag” key points with phrases like, “The most important thing is ...” or “I think the bottom line is ...”
- DO speak in easily understandable terms. Avoid jargon and technical terms if simpler words would do.
- DO use illustrations and anecdotes to “humanize” and explain your topic. (“Enough patients to fill Dodger Stadium” is better than “75,000 patients.”)
- DO be sensitive to reporters’ deadlines.
- DO be yourself. Don’t try to reinvent yourself for an interview — you won’t be credible. Be the best you can be.
- DO relax, relax, relax.
- DO be on time for your interview, whether it’s face-to-face or by telephone.
- DO respond to questions in the “inverted pyramid” style. This means that your first sentence or two should provide the reporter with the most important message.
- DO listen to the reporter before responding with your message. Match a key message to the question when possible.
- DO provide accurate spelling of your name, department or any other affiliation.
- DO be honest. If you don’t know the answer to a reporter’s question, don’t try to fudge it! Tell the reporter you don’t know the answer but will find out and call back as soon as possible. It’s also a good idea to get the reporter’s deadline so you can ensure you don’t miss it.
- DO be a stickler for accuracy. If a reporter presents inaccurate information in general conversation or as part of the interview, correct it right away.
- DO ask for clarification if you do not understand a question. Reporters will often ask several questions at once. Listen carefully, and answer one question at a time.
- DO use some facts and figures as appropriate to demonstrate your credibility.

## **What NOT to do during an interview:**

- DON'T over-answer. When you're satisfied with your message, stop.
- DON'T be afraid to pause. Taking a few seconds to think will seem much longer to you than to the reporter or audience, and will make you appear thoughtful and deliberate.
- DON'T allow yourself to be provoked. Keep cool.
- DON'T "fake" an answer if you don't know it. If appropriate, assure the reporter you will provide the needed facts in a timely manner, or refer him/her to another source.
- DON'T assume the reporter knows more about your area than you do. Usually, the reverse is true.
- DON'T assume the microphone, camera or tape recorder is off immediately before or after an interview. You are still "fair game." It's safest to consider your entire interaction "on the record."
- DON'T keep a reporter waiting. Be on time for your interview.
- DON'T be off-handed or too casual with any of your responses. Nothing is off the record. Don't say anything you would not want to appear in the media.
- DON'T make predictions, grandiose statements, or stray from approved responses and messages.
- DON'T be intimidated by a reporter. If you feel uncomfortable about answering a question, say so and find the reporter another contact that might be more knowledgeable.
- DON'T ask a reporter to send you a copy of the final article or tape. And don't expect to see a copy of the final interview before it publishes or airs, although some major newspapers and magazines will double check quotes.