

# Television Interviews

On television, presentation is just as important as what you say. The format and restrictions of television interviews also demand a solid command of “headlining,” “blocking and bridging” and the other communications techniques.

Here are some specific tips to help you with television interviews:

- Unless the interview is live, your comments will be edited heavily. Less than a minute (one to three 20-second “sound bites”) of a 10-minute taped interview may actually appear on air. Help ensure your messages are selected for air by delivering them concisely, coherently and with energy. Television news thrives on strong sound bites.
- Dress conservatively. For men, a dark suit and blue shirt is best. Avoid loud ties or ties with small patterns. For women, wear a dark-colored outfit in solid colors. Avoid white clothing. White casts unflattering light on the face and causes problems for cameras. Don’t wear large, shiny or noisy jewelry.
- If you have contact lenses, wear them instead of your glasses. If you wear glasses, non-reflective lenses are preferable. Don’t wear light-sensitive glasses.
- If offered makeup, accept it. The host or reporter will have it on. You should, too. Men should consider shaving before the interview. Women should apply a matte finish powder or foundation to avoid a shiny face.
- Arrive early at the station to orient yourself to the studio. If the interview takes place on location, arrive early to allow for lighting and sound checks.
- Typically, a “pre-interview” precedes the actual on-camera interview. It may last 30 seconds or five minutes. Use this opportunity to evaluate the personality and demeanor of the interviewer and to mention points you would like to make. The pre-interview often helps set the tone for the actual interview.
- If seated, sit erect but not ramrod-straight. Angle yourself slightly forward, or toward the interviewer. If standing, stand with arms at sides or one hand in pocket. Planting one foot slightly in front of the other will help you avoid swaying.
- Gesture naturally, but not expansively. Keep gestures small and in front of you. Avoid sudden body movement.

- Make your expression match your words. Smile when appropriate. Maintain a pleasant expression. An expression that looks neutral off-camera can look unhappy or angry on-camera, so a pleasant face may feel unnaturally “smiley” at first. Practice in a mirror.
- Bring attention to key points by leaning forward slightly and modulating your voice.
- Do not nod your head to indicate that you understand or are ready to answer the question. You might inadvertently convey agreement with the questioner’s premise when you don’t mean to do so. Remain neutral and become animated only when you begin to speak.
- Remember to make your statements punchy and concise. Present your most important message early in the interview and repeat as appropriate.
- Whether you are participating in an in-studio talk show format or a stand-up interview, talk to the interviewer or other guests, not the camera. Breaking eye contact by staring off into space or looking at the ground will make you appear “shifty.” Stay attentive even when others are speaking.
- Don’t be distracted by the activity around you in the studio or by the camera crew. Keep focused on the interviewer.
- Don’t overlap your answers with the reporter’s questions. Wait until the question is finished to begin your answer.
- Hold your “interview attitude” until the interview is completely over and the camera is off.
- Stay on message! Stay on message! Stay on message!