

Media Training



**UNIVERSITY
COMMUNICATIONS**

The big 3 takeaways



Engaging media is important.



Comms people are here to help.



Prepare and practice.

University Communications Media Relations is here to help!



mediarelations@unc.edu



(919) 445-8555

- **Communicate with media.** We can pitch stories to media or to content creators on campus, coordinate interviews, take an interview request off your hands if you're not interested, and more!
- **Help prepare for an interview.** We can give you a media training, practice an interview with you, or give you important info (context on media trends, info on the outlet or reporter, etc.)

From Inquiry to Interview: The Process

- Receive an inquiry
- Prepare for an interview
- During the interview
- After the interview

Things to consider if you receive a request from the media directly

- **It's always okay to ask for more information** about the story before agreeing to an interview.
- **If you're unfamiliar with the outlet, visit their website.** Notice if there's any affiliations or biases that might impact reporting.
- **Read/watch a story by the reporter** to get a sense of their tone and interviewing tactics.
- If a reporter is an Investigative Reporter, that *might* indicate a negative story.

Tip: You can loop Comms staff when you receive a request for their help with this process.

Responding to Requests

- **Try to work with the reporter's deadline if you can.** Reporters often need to do interviews same or next day.
- **Select the response type that works for you and the reporter.** Options include in-person interview, Zoom interview, phone interview, and written responses.
- **Check if the interview is recorded or live.** Most interviews are recorded, but it's good to check!

Know the Lingo

- **On record:** Can be quoted directly or indirectly and attributed to your full name and title
- **On background:** Quotes can be used, but name is withheld. An anonymous signifier is used instead.
- **Off record:** Conversation can not be published in story

Tip: It is generally assumed interviews are on record.

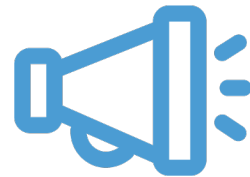
Also, while these different categories are a professional standard, they are not legally binding. It's a good practice to only give an interview if you're comfortable with your name showing up in the piece.

Preparing for an Interview

Deliver Your Message



You own the interview.



Be message driven,
not question driven.

Tactics & Strategies

Lead with your message. Frontload your answer with the most important information.

Keep it short and simple. Be conversational and personable but avoid the temptation to overshare. Stop when you've answered the question and do not worry about awkward silences.

Utilize flagging and bridging techniques. More on that in a minute!

Own your words. Do not repeat or use negative comments, statements, or red-flag words (like scandal or fraud) if a reporter brings them up.

TACTICS & STRATEGIES

Bridge to Key Messaging

- **Bridging** is a technique that can help you stay on message even if the reporter is steering you away from what you want to talk about or asks a potentially dangerous question. By using a transitional phrase to take back control of the interview and reintroduce your key points, bridging helps you stay on message. **Remember, you are in control of the interview.**

Examples of Bridging

- **Redirect to original message:**
 - *“What matters most in this situation is...”*
 - *“There’s another perspective here...”*
 - *“I can’t speculate on a hypothetical, but what I can tell you is...”*
- **Pass to someone else:**
 - *“That question lies outside of my expertise and would be better suited for someone who has experience in... , but what I can tell you is...”*
- **If you truly don’t know the answer, it’s okay to say that you don’t know or you’ll need to check on some information and get back to the reporter. Never lie, guess, or speculate.**

TACTICS & STRATEGIES

Addressing Factual Errors

If they use inaccurate information in their question, politely let them know then return, or bridge, to your key message or points.

- **“First, let’s clarify the facts...”**
- **“That’s not actually the case, in fact our findings show...”**

TACTICS & STRATEGIES

Flagging

Flagging is a verbal cue that signals when you're saying something of particular importance. It allows you to highlight your key messages throughout the conversation and helps prevent the journalist from drawing their own conclusions.

- “Let’s not lose sight of our main goal...”
- “There are three main objectives: one...two...three...”
- “The most important thing to remember...”

Common questions

Something general: What's happening today? Tell me about your research.

Why it's important: Why is this important for the audience? How is this different or new from what we knew before? Why is this innovative?

What's next: How does this impact the field, future work, or policies? What are next steps for you or your colleagues?

What should the audience do or feel: What action items should the audience take or not take? Should they or should they not be concerned?

Whatever is the thing you hope they don't ask

Anything else you'd like to discuss?

During an Interview



Notes – For phone interviews, have talking points in front of you.



On-Camera Interviews

- Make eye contact with the reporter. If it's a live interview and there isn't a reporter look directly into the camera.
- Sit with both feet on the ground. Don't cross your legs.
- Place your hands in your lap.
- Wear professional clothes that make you feel comfortable and empowered. Avoid small busy patterns that could strobe on camera.



Zoom Interviews

- Be mindful of what's in the background. Choose something that adds dimension such as a bookshelf. Don't sit in front of a window and make sure you don't have any harsh corners behind your head, such as a frame or vent.
- Raise the computer to eye level.
- Look directly into your computer's camera.
- Be mindful of lighting. Test the video ahead of time to make sure there aren't any shadows over your face and that it's not too bright or too dark.

Practical tips on getting started

- 1) Get to know your communicators.
- 2) Let your deans, program leaders, etc know that you're interested in media engagement.
- 3) Take on internal, local and "smaller" opportunities.
- 4) Keep your online profiles (UNC-CH websites, lab website, LinkedIn, social media, etc.) up to date.
- 5) Stay up with general news, as well as news in your field.



A note on open meetings

Anything you say in an open meeting, for example Faculty Council, Faculty Executive Committee or Board of Trustees, is on-the-record. Members of the media are often present at these meetings and even when they're not, the information presented or shared during an open meeting becomes a public record and is also noted in the meeting minutes, which are shared publicly. Keep this in mind when giving presentations, sharing updates or answering questions at any open meetings.

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THE UNIVERSITY
of NORTH CAROLINA
at CHAPEL HILL