



Radio interviews

This may seem obvious, but the main thing to remember about the radio is that people are usually busy doing something else while they are listening to it – driving, cooking or ironing. It's very important that you are as engaging as possible and that you address the listeners as though you were talking to a friend or acquaintance. Try to create vivid pictures so that the listeners can imagine what you are describing.

If a journalist asks to interview you, the first thing to ask yourself is, am I the best person to do the interview? Make sure that the person who is most comfortable being interviewed about the issue is put forward.

Before agreeing to do a radio interview, it is perfectly normal to ask a number of questions. These include:

- What is the interview about?
- Will I be interviewed alone or are others being interviewed with me?
- How long will the interview last?
- Is it pre-recorded or live?

Try to sound reasonably relaxed when you ask these questions. Try not to let the journalist think you are very suspicious or anxious. Most journalists will be happy to supply information. However you can't expect to be told exactly which questions will be asked.

Be prepared

Before you do a radio interview, prepare what you're going to say! Decide what points you want to make (up to three), write them down and rehearse them beforehand. Use carefully chosen words, never ramble. Write your points on a card and put it in front of you while you are being interviewed (don't hold a piece of paper in your hand as this will rustle).

Get your point across

If you haven't managed to get across the key points you have prepared, get them in somehow. You can do this by saying 'I'm happy to answer that question, but first I'd just like to point out...', or 'That may be true, but the key issue is....'

Never reply yes to a question you are unsure about. (The answer yes will enable the journalist to say you agree with the whole question). Barack Obama in his book 'Audacity of Hope' describes an experience of being interviewed where the

journalist repeated asked 'you must have felt very betrayed by X'. Obama knew that to reply 'yes' would produce a headline 'Obama Feels Betrayed by X'.

Pre-recorded interviews

These can be done anywhere. Despite what most people think, it's better to do live interviews as they can't be edited. If you really mess up an answer, you can cough or splutter and ask to do it again. Just because the interview is pre-recorded, don't be lulled into thinking you have more time. Be as concise as you can to avoid too much editing. **Try to make sure that you would be happy with each sentence, if used on its own.**

Avoid jargon

Never use jargon or acronyms. People who work in health are sometimes blissfully unaware of how much 'health service speak' they have absorbed.

Be clear, concise and friendly

Never allow yourself to become riled by an interviewer as this will put the listeners off. No matter how irritated you feel, it's always better to respond calmly and reasonably.

Be yourself

Try to sound natural. Make your key point (s) early on, you may have less time than you think. Speak clearly, and sound confident and passionate.

Limit the numbers

It's OK to use one or two facts and figures to make your point, but don't overdo it or the listener will switch off.

Paint a picture

Radio is heard and not seen. People listening to the radio are usually doing something else at the same time – driving, cooking, ironing. So try to engage your listeners as much as you can.

Anticipate a challenge

Before you call, think what challenges could be thrown to you and try to prepare an answer. If you're not happy with the way the conversation is going, you could say 'I'm not here to talk about that – I'm here to tell your listeners...'

Radio Phone-ins

Many radio programmes take the form of phone-ins. This is when members of the public can phone a number broadcast on air and ask a question either to an expert or a panel.

Phoning in with a question:

It doesn't matter that you are the one asking the question – if you are articulate and frame your question clearly, you will have an excellent opportunity to get your point across.

Any Answers

Why not call Any Answers on BBC Radio 4, which comes from a different place each week? If you have a comment or question on the programme or you would like to take part in the phone in you can:

Email: See www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/news/anyquestions

Call: 03700 100 444

(Calls cost no more than calls to 01 and 02 geographic landlines. Lines open Sat 12:30)

Write to: Any Answers?
BBC Broadcasting House
London W1A 1AA

Local phone-ins

Most local radio stations have a phone-in programme. This is one of the easiest and best ways of getting publicity. You can either phone in with a question or contact the producer and ask how you can take part.

When you dial the number, you will first have to put your question to someone who is filtering the calls. If your question is accepted, you will be called back a minute or so before you go on air.

- Write your question down before you make the call
- Make your question clear and succinct
- Ask as precise a question as you can
- Try your question out on a friend before you call
- Switch off the radio/TV before you call
- Send friends/family/dogs out of the room!

Only those callers deemed interesting, sensible and clear will be put through. Once you have been put through to the person you are putting the question to, you will be asked to repeat it.

Follow your question up with another if you can, or if you aren't happy with the response. Always try to sound reasonable, never aggressive, as this will put the audience off.

TV interviews

All the points made about radio interviews apply to television interviews – the only difference being – we can see you!

How to dress

Try to avoid looking like a stereotype. You want people to listen to what you have to say without being put off by your appearance. Avoid wearing anything that distracts from what you're saying (giant dangly earrings...). However you

don't need to look like a bank manager or a politician. Just wear what you feel comfortable in. Avoid stripes and crazy patterns.

The background

If they come to you, make sure you are happy with where you're being interviewed – particularly check out the background. It's usually best to be interviewed against a plain background if you can.

Live or pre-recorded

The same issues about live or pre-recorded interviews apply to radio and television. Pre-recorded interviews are edited and so you are better doing a live interview if you get the chance. Just because the interview is pre-recorded doesn't mean you can ramble on. On the contrary, the more you say, the more editing will be done, and the more likelihood that what you are trying to say will be distorted.

Alison Whyte
April 2009