

Communication PRinciples for Principals

INTERVIEWING TECHNIQUES



IDEA

If your staff members or students are approached by a reporter on school grounds, have them notify you immediately.



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<http://www.dodea.edu>

HOW CAN WE BETTER TELL THE DoDEA STORY? INTERVIEWING TECHNIQUES FOR SCHOOL LEADERS

PREPARING FOR THE INTERVIEW

What’s the topic?

- What is this interview about?
- What particular aspect(s) are being focused on?
- Who is the right person to do the interview?

Do some research

- Define the reporter’s agenda.
- What is their name/affiliation?
- What kinds of articles/interviews have they done in the past?
- What else has been published or aired recently on this topic?
- What is their deadline? When will the interview be published/aired?
- Who else will the reporter speak to for the story?
- How much does the reporter know about the topic?
- Talk to the area/installation PAO – what do they know about this reporter?
- What kinds of questions (fair and unfair) might the reporter ask?

The “message” is a concise point you want your audience to know and remember.

Create your messages

- Messages for broadcast media average between 5 and 20 seconds.
- A normal sound bite is 8 seconds.
- Print messages rarely exceed 1-3 lines.
- A message tells why the topic is important in the audience’s real world.
- A message is the key point(s) you are going to get across no matter what!

Clarify the details

- You don't have to give the interview right then and there.
- Find out the deadline and assure the reporter that you will call back before the deadline.
- Make sure you understand the focus of the story.
- Immediately contact your PAO.
- Work with your PAO to develop key messages, brainstorm likely questions and compose appropriate answers that incorporate your key messages.

Be message driven

- Know what your messages are.
- Be consistent in delivering them.
- Assertively bring them into the interview.
- Be empathic. Be sincere.

WHAT IS THE INTERVIEW FORMAT?

Telephone

- Probably the most common format.
- Determine the focus of the interview.
- First prepare, then call back reporter.
- Have a communications rep or PAO sit in if you think it's necessary.
- Be animated – stand up and walk around if it helps your energy.
- Keep answers simple, but offer detailed material/date via fax or e-mail.

Television

- Appearance is vital! Take a minute to check hair, tie, shirt, etc.
- Don't wear tinted glasses. If you use contacts, wear them.
- Look at the interviewer and not the camera unless otherwise told.
- If possible, choose a location that reinforces your messages.
- Your body language tells a story. If topic is solemn, avoid smiles. If topic is exciting, use nonverbal communication to express passion.

Radio

- Use vivid, colorful words and phrases.
- Ensure your pitch, tone and rate of speed match subject matter.

Print

- Prepare yourself for a more in-depth interview.
- Interview location always affects reporter's impression of you, your school, and DoDEA.
- Feel free to record the interview. Listen to your recording and follow-up with additional information when appropriate.
- Ask the reporter for feedback to ensure you are understood.

DURING THE INTERVIEW

General tips

- Relax – treat the interview like you would a normal conversation.
- Don't talk too much, give too much detail, or use educational jargon.

Legitimate pre-interview concerns

- Will the questions be fair?
- Does the reporter have a hidden agenda?
- Can I control the interview process?
- What are the rules of engagement?
- Will I be misquoted?
- Will the reporter understand the issues?

Eliminate pre-interview concerns.

- Remember, you start in a great position -- you have something the media wants.

Establish the ground rules

- Call back on time.
- Reiterate the subject of the interview
- Establish the areas NOT open for discussion
- Establish the interview length, location, day, and time.
- Choose the interview site carefully.

Conduct the interview

- With Professionalism
- With Confidence
- With Control
- With Adequate Preparation

USE TECHNIQUES OF CONTROL

Bridging

Bridging is a verbal maneuver to reform question in terms most favorable to you. Lead-in phrases: "That's one perspective..." "What concerns me even more..."

Flagging

Body/hand/ facial gestures, tone of voice, leaning forward to make a point, etc.
Why? Draws attention to what you are identifying as a key response.

Hooking

Begs the question and baits the reporter to ask the question you want: "I think your audience may be interested in our two major concerns and initiatives..."

The "record"

On the record – everything you say can be reported verbatim and you can be identified by name and position as the source of information. This is the way to do business.

Off the record – The reporter 'agrees' to take information from a protected source without doing the story or identifying the informant in any way. This does not preclude the reporter from obtaining information from other sources.

As a matter of principal and basic policy, you should be prepared to live with everything you say to a reporter or don't say it at all!

INTERVIEW “DOs”

- **DO** respect a reporter’s deadline.
- **DO** project a positive image – be confident and relaxed.
- **DO** be animated.
- **DO** stay in your lane.
- **DO** correct misstatements.
- **DO** set ground rules for the topic and length of the interview.
- **DO** pause and think about your answers - silence can be edited.
- **DO** keep answers short, simple and people-oriented.
- **DO** say “I don’t know that answer.” It’s okay to get back with them about it later.
- **DO** put your main points first.
- **DO** be message driven, not question driven.

INTERVIEW “DON’Ts”

- **DON’T** speak “Off the record.”
- **DON’T** lie.
- **DON’T** repeat negative words or statements – make the correction.
- **DON’T** lose your temper – pause – breathe – then answer.
- **DON’T** use acronyms.
- **DON’T** say “No comment” – explain WHY you can’t answer a question.
- **DON’T** be question driven – be message driven!

ALWAYS ASK FOR HELP

- Contact your DSO.
- Contact the Area Communications Office or DoDEA Communications (703-588-3260/3265).
- Contact your local military public affairs office.

Sources: US Army Executive Media Training, NSPRA, & the Center for Advanced Media Studies