When a Reporter Calls

Make every attempt to return calls immediately as reporters are on tight deadlines, usually same day.
  
  ○ What is the reporter's name and organization? Is it legitimate? Biased?
  ○ What is the purpose of the article or reporting assignment?
  ○ Where do you or your organization fit in the story?

If possible schedule a face-to-face interview. Invite the reporter to your office.

Spell your name for the reporter.

  • Usually, the first things you say have the most impact, so mention the points which are most important to you at the very beginning of the interview.
  • If you have time, preview the reporter's work. (i.e. Online newspapers)
  • Keep in mind the reporter's primary needs for the story: Who, What, Where, When, How and most importantly WHY.
  • The result you want is for the audience to nod in agreement with your points and respond with: "Gee, that really makes sense," or "I didn't know that."

If you have a simple fact sheet or brochure about your work, give a copy to the reporter to take -- and attach a business card.

Although you will probably not be offered a chance to read the reporter's story, offer to be available for any follow-up questions. If they call back, you may be able to correct an inaccuracy.

More Interview Tips

Be enthusiastic. If you don't appear to care, why should anyone else?
Make eye contact with reporter.
Wear solid colors -- not white or black. Conservative clothing.
  
  Absolutely, no tiny stripes or prints like herring bone suit coats, particularly for TV.
Keep comments short -- 3 good sentences.
  
  Remember, for TV, the entire story may only be 1 to 2 minutes in length.
Repeat important points -- say them in different, interesting ways.
Use metaphors and common examples -- no jargon. (e.g. The vine is a plant’s umbilical cord.)
If possible, provide an attractive office, lab with equipment to demonstrate or other colorful visuals, conference room or other quiet location for the interview particularly if a photo will be taken.
Keep your affiliation/title short (i.e. Registered Dietician -- rather than associate director of nutritional development for infants in the center for children's studies at the institute for human health in the ....)

Never lie.
Don't be afraid to say that you don't know the answer to a question. Don't be offended if a reporter asks you questions that are critical "what-if questions" about your work. They frequently want to know the negative angle. It's better to admit that there is a down side and show that you've thought about it, too.

Answer the "wrong question" with the "right answer."
Saying "No comment" sounds like you're hiding something.
"Off the record" is NEVER off the record.

If you are extremely uncomfortable with doing a TV or radio interview, don't do it. It’s ok to decline an interview or recommend a colleague.