

Tips for Dealing with Reporters

Provided by WVU University Relations/News

- **DO** look at every interview as an opportunity to help you communicate important facts with your stakeholders.
- **DO** respond promptly and respect reporters' deadlines.
- **DO** anticipate questions you might be asked and develop your key messages accordingly in advance of your interview (utilize UR/News and Student Life communicators as resources; we are happy to help you develop messages for an interview.)
- **DO** answer questions directly and concisely.
- **DO** provide only the facts.
- **DO** tactfully correct any inaccurate information reporters employ in their questioning.
- **DO** correct yourself if you provide information that is not 100 percent accurate. In order to establish credibility with the media—and more importantly, the public—you have to be honest with them.
- **DO** stop talking when you have answered a question.
- **DO** offer to get back to the reporter with the information if you do not know the answer to a particular question.
- **DO** behave professionally. Remember, you are representing WVU and playing a part in crafting the public's opinion of the student body every time you offer a quote to a reporter, step in front of the camera and address the public.
- **DO** clarify in advance whether a broadcast interview will be aired live or as an edited story.
- **DO** get ahead of a story if you know something controversial is approaching. It's better to be proactive than reactive!
- **DO** remember that good rapport with reporters will help you during a crisis. Know the media and build relationships *before you need them*.
- **DO** use strong language.
“We are committed to” sounds stronger than “We may”.
“We are doing” sounds stronger than “We are trying”.
“What we know at this time is” sounds stronger than “I think”.
- **DO** remember that any meeting open to the public (SGA meetings, for example) may be attended by the media and anything you say during that meeting can be used for public

consumption – whether in a news story or via social media.

Plan for controversial meetings in advance; develop key messages and write out talking points.

- **DO NOT** say “no comment”. There are more constructive ways to bypass a question you can’t directly address:
“Since the investigation is still pending, we don’t have answers to those questions right now. We’ll provide you with more details once the investigation is complete.”
“We don’t have the answer to that question right now, but what I can tell you is...” (use the opportunity to work in your messages.)
- **DO NOT** go “off the record”. Never say anything to a reporter you don’t want to read in tomorrow’s headlines.
- **DO NOT** allow a reporter to lead you into speculation.
Respond to speculative questions by taking the opportunity to emphasize your key messages and facts. “We don’t want to speculate, but what we do know at this time is...”
- **DO NOT** avoid returning a reporter’s phone call. By not talking to the media, you relinquish control of the story and it makes it look like you are hiding something. They will still seek out the story without your input.
- **DO NOT** assume a reporter or your audience is an expert in your topic. Explain your points clearly and concisely on a level that all audiences can understand.
- **DO NOT** use acronyms. (i.e. don’t say “COM” when referencing the College of Media; not everyone will understand the acronym. Always use the full name of the college or organization.)
- **DO NOT** feel obligated to answer a question the way it is asked; use it as an opportunity to convey your messages.
- **DO NOT** be afraid to ask a reporter to clarify a question.
- **DO NOT** ever argue with or attack a reporter. Use your response as an opportunity to work in your messages.
- **DO NOT** feel you have to fill the silence after answering a question.
- **DO NOT** feel obligated to give a reporter an interview on-the-spot. A reporter may initially reach out to you via phone or even stop by your office and pressure you for an interview while they

are talking with you. Ask them for their deadline and let them know you'll get back to them at a specific time. (This will give you the opportunity to consult with WVU communicators, anticipate questions and prepare your facts.)

Remember, an interview is more than what you say. During broadcast interviews, be mindful of:

Body Language

- Energy
- Eye contact – look at the reporter, not the camera
- Gestures
- Posture

Vocal Quality

- Speak normally
- Slow down
- Channel nervous energy
- Avoid verbal fillers
- Remember to breathe; it's ok to pause to compose yourself
- Silence can be golden

Appearance and Attire

- Dress professionally and look like yourself
- Keep your wardrobe simple and appropriate (wear solid-colored clothing if possible)
- Keep your makeup subtle
- Your hair should frame your face
- Remove glasses or wear glare-resistant lenses
- Avoid dark glasses and hats

Important WVU Contacts

If you are contacted by the media, please utilize Student Life and University Relations/News communicators as resources. We can help you develop your messages and anticipate questions.

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