



Be Prepared For the Questions

Are you intending to write a press release, to give an interview or to arrange a press conference? Then you may have already reflected upon what you want to say. Maybe you have also started to plan the circumstances of the event, e. g. you organized a tour in your laboratory or you selected the press room. But there is still something essential for you to prepare, and that is what this tip sheet is about.

What might journalists want to know?

You should also consider in advance, what a journalist might ask you, and you should prepare your answers. It is improbable that journalists will only ask you what you already planned. Your preparation may all be for nought, after you finish with the journalists' first questions, the interview runs in another direction than the one you planned.

Therefore you should think about what the public presumably wants to know about your work, what are likely to be important issues, and in which context your statements will be: Is it an article about your research? Do you comment on a controversy? Is the programme rather entertaining or educational? To help you, think about what your audiences usually want to know during guided tours, lectures, and exhibitions. Therefore do not confine yourself to scientific facts, but also consider further possible questions, e.g.:

1. What is the social context of your work? What is the public use of your research's results? Who is affected by them? To whom might your work be detrimental? If, for example, the building of a kindergarten is delayed due to your archaeological excavation, you might be asked why you think this is justifiable.
2. What are the actual issues involved in your research? (e. g. to the GMO debate)
3. Possible conflicts of interest or partiality: Who is financing your research? Maybe a journalist wants to know whether you share in the newly founded biotech company in your town, or of which committees you are a member. It would be correct, by the way, to mention this yourself.
4. General questions ("How do hurricanes originate?" "What is a comet?") and questions that are oriented to the public's interests (",Why do women have cold feet so often?")
5. Critique ("Why do even the seriously ill have to wait a long time until they get an appointment at your hospital?")
6. Speculation ("Is there intelligent life on other planets?")
7. Personal questions ("How do you feel when you see a dead corpse?", "Why did you study physics?").

What will be the main theme of the interview?

If you already know who is going to interview you, you could ask her or him, in which direction the talk is planned to run. Sometimes radio and TV journalists will tell you their first question. It is quite unusual, however, for them to submit all their questions to you. Firstly, journalists do not like to have their freedom constricted. Secondly, such interviews too often appear staged.

Do you have your audience in mind?

Good preparation is not about perfect phrases learnt by heart. An interview with a journalist is certainly not an examination. And surely you have already listened to or watched interviews with an interviewee who sounded contrived and oily as he or she rattled out sentences learnt by heart. Your preparation should help you not to break sweat during the interview. You will be articulate, if you considered the audience's interests in your research before the interview.

Be an active part of the interview

In the middle of all these details do not forget, what messages you intended to transmit, and what you think is important to mention. Do not only react to questions, but also be an active participant in your appearance in the mass media.

Journalism – Media Training – Archaeology
Diane Scherzler M. A.
www.diane-scherzler.de
mail@diane-scherzler.de