

Media “Cheat Sheet”

Finessing Media Interviews

Every author wants media coverage for his or her book. But when the media does come calling, many authors worry about what they should say and how to behave. Here are some general tips for making media interviews work.

1. **Create Three Sound Bites.** Your sound bites must capture the essence of your book. You'll need them to make a memorable impression on your audience, and for use during short interviews (noon news, drive-time radio, etc.). Be sure to have supporting points that you can use to amplify and explain your sound bites during longer media engagements.
2. **Avoid Jargon and Technical Language.** Use analogies to explain concepts. Simplify your work, but don't patronize or talk down to the host, reporter, or audience.
3. **Prepare for Interviews.** Practice your delivery with friends and relatives. Record yourself. If possible, familiarize yourself with the shows you'll be on, and read articles by the reporters who will interview you, in advance.
4. **Lose the Stress.** Relax before the interview — breathe from your diaphragm. Flex and relax your muscles. Mentally transfer nervousness to your ankle, elbow, or some place else that's off-camera.
5. **Connect with the Host or Reporter.** Be a good listener so you can respond appropriately to all questions. Make, and then maintain, eye contact with the interviewer. Build a rapport, one question at a time.
6. **Turn in a Strong Performance.** Remember that you're there to help the producer or reporter create a compelling and/or entertaining segment, talk show, or article. To that end, show enthusiasm; lean slightly forward in your chair; vary your speech rate and volume; and keep your answers concise.
7. **Guide the Interview.** If the host asks a question you can't, or don't want to, answer, bridge back to your message points. You might say, "That's interesting, but what's really at issue here is" . . . or "I can't really address that topic, but I can tell you that. . . ."
8. **Stay Cool.** If the interview gets heated, or even if a host gets combative or argumentative, don't respond in kind. Also, don't repeat the host's negative phrases; that will only call attention to them. Try to seize opportunities to bridge back to your media points or change the subject altogether.
9. **Never Speak "Off the Record."** NOTHING is off the record, and don't ever assume your conversation isn't being recorded. Beware of idle chitchat with people in the media. You never know for sure when the camera or microphone is on and you're on the air.
10. **Plant a Seed for the Future.** After the show, send a thank-you note to the host expressing your appreciation for the interview — you'll stand out as a quality guest and maximize your chance of a return invitation.