

A Compendium on media interaction  
compiled by the Press and Public Information  
Department of the European Union  
Advisory Mission Ukraine



# INTERACTING WITH MEDIA



# Content

Who can use this Compendium? .....	Page 2
Working with the media .....	Page 3
Each interview is different.....	Page 5
When a media approaches you .....	Page 6
What do you want to say? .....	Page 8
Getting ready for the interview! .....	Page 11
Universal tips for all interviews .....	Page 13
Bridging your way to a successful interview .....	Page 15
Different types of interviews and their characteristics .....	Page 17
TV interviews.....	Page 17
Door-step interviews .....	Page 19
Press conferences.....	Page 20
Radio interviews .....	Page 21
Print interview for newspapers or magazines .....	Page 22
Skype interviews .....	Page 23
Online interviews .....	Page 25
Learn from your experience .....	Page 26
Planning for communication during a crisis situation .....	Page 27
Crisis communication principles .....	Page 31
BBC’s checklist for crisis communication .....	Page 32



## Interacting with Media

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# Who can use this Compendium?

The purpose of this Compendium is to serve as an “easy-to-read” guide to media interaction. It aims to improve the quality and results of various types of media interaction as well as unexpected media encounters.

Ultimately it aims to use any and all media interactions to strengthen the reputation, standing, and trustworthiness of public organisations and agencies in their cooperation with media.

The Compendium is compiled to assist press officers, press secretaries, press attachés, etc. in their work with media outlets and media representatives such as journalists, reporters, correspondents, and Electronic News-Gathering (ENG) teams.

It focusses on the role of the media adviser, i.e. the person who facilitates the media interaction whilst advising or guiding the organisation’s leadership, senior management or spokesperson before, during and after the actual media interaction.

The Compendium can also be used to assist the spokesperson in the preparation and conduct of his or her own direct interaction with media representatives.

The ‘Interacting with media’ Compendium offers ideas, tips, tricks, and checklists, but should not be seen as an exhaustive curriculum in the field of media interaction.

# Working with the media

## **Build and develop your personal and institutional relations with media and media people - but know the rules!**

To succeed in your job, you need access to the media. The same applies to media. To do their job, media representatives need access to your organisation.

Invest time in building good working relationships with local, regional, national and, if relevant, international media representatives.

This investment will pay off in terms of the trust that will be built over time. This again will pay off in your regular contact with media - in particular, if you are required to respond to an incident.

Robust media relations will assist you in managing a potential crisis, major incident or politically sensitive issue.

Begin by establishing a list of key media and named media representatives, including their personal contact details.

### **Know the rules of attribution**

In the process of building and developing relationships with media, you must understand the three most common categories of "speaking terms" which cover the information provided to a media representative during the media interaction. These terms are referred to as the "rules of attribution".

Before you, or the person to whom you are the media adviser, says anything to a media representative, make sure that it is agreed between you what these terms mean, as well as when they apply and when they do not.

No matter if you speak on-the-record, not for attribution or on background, spell out your expectations clearly and completely to the media representative.

If you're uncertain about whether the media representative should be offered a specific piece of information, it's better to say nothing.

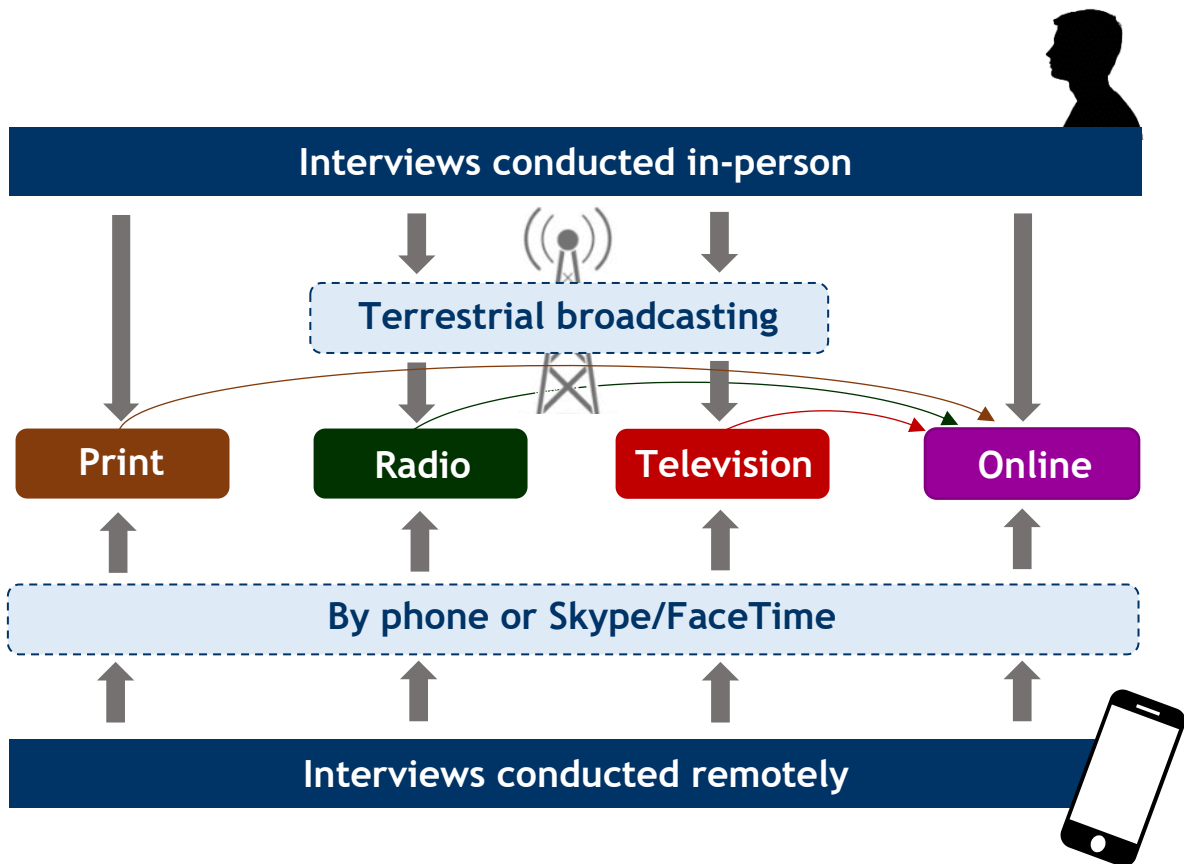
<p><b>“On-the-record”</b></p>	<p>Whether you speak in person, on the phone, via email or through a tweet, everything you say can be quoted and attributed to you by name and job title. Unless otherwise stated, assume that everything you say is “on-the-record”.</p>
<p><b>“Not for Attribution” (Off-the-record)</b></p>	<p>This is similar to speaking “on-the-record”. Your comments may be quoted directly, but your quote cannot be attributed directly to your name (or title). Instead, the source can be identified in general terms (e.g., “a government employee”).</p> <p>Before saying anything, you and the media representative must agree on how the story will identify you as the source.</p> <p>Keep in mind that even if you’re not specifically identified, it may still be obvious to the audience who the source was.</p>
<p><b>“On Background”</b></p>	<p>On background briefings or conversations are not for publication, but can be used when meeting informally with a media representative to convey background information, which will enhance his or her understanding of a general or specific situation or explaining why you cannot (yet) discuss a specific issue. It can also be used to pitch potential story ideas.</p> <p>Before you speak, establish clearly that the conversation is “off-the-record” and make sure that the media representative agrees that the information is “on background” only and that you cannot be quoted.</p> <p>Be careful to avoid going on and off the record multiple times during the conversation, as both you and the media representative may get confused about what was said under what conditions.</p>

# Each interview is different

Whereas each individual interview is unique in its own way, each interview type has its own characteristics, which requires preparation and approach adapted to the type.

Usually, interviews are conducted *in-person* either as a one-to-one interview, as part of a press conference or as a door-step interview following an important event. Interviews can also be conducted *remotely* by phone or through Skype or similar applications.

Typically, the interview will be tailored to be published on a primary media platform, e.g. television and then adapted by the editorial staff for parallel publication on other platforms e.g. online, radio and print. Globally online platforms are growing rapidly and increasing their penetration and reach.



On the following pages, this Compendium will address interviews in general as well as the specifics of the interview categories.

# When media approaches you

## A media representative calls you - what to do?

In most cases you or someone else in your organisation will be approached by a media representative by phone or email with a request for an interview, comment or statement, or for information. This is called a media enquiry.

All members of your entire organisation must know to whom they should direct such media enquiries.

Depending on the situation, you will have a shorter or longer response time. Unless there is a current, ongoing incident or crisis, the media representative will usually request an appointment for an interview to take place at a later time - or allow you time to prepare a comment.

Before you hang up, take time to ask the media representative a few questions (see the box to the right). If you are approached by email, you can ask back by email.

- 1. May I have your contact details (again)?**
  - Your name?
  - Your phone number?
  - Your media outlet?
  - Do you cover a particular topic?
- 2. Can you tell me more about the story you're working on?**
  - Keep the question open-ended and remain quiet while the media representative answers.
  - **Ask also:** Are you approaching this story from any particular perspective?
- 3. What do you need from me?**
  - **When** will the interview be conducted and **how** much time is needed?
  - **Where and how** (in-person or remote) will the interview be conducted?
  - **Who** will be doing the interview (name of the interviewer)?
  - If relevant, ask if you can provide fact sheets, graphics, photos or videos. If the media accepts your materials, it might expand your presence in the news story and support your narrative.
- 4. What format will you be using?**
  - **For broadcast interviews**, find out if the interview will be live or recorded (unedited or edited). Is it a panel interview? Will there be more interviewees? What program will it be used for?
  - **For print interviews**, find out if you are expected to deliver a short quote or statement or if the media is working on an investigative in-depth piece.
- 5. When and where do you plan to publish or broadcast the story?**

### **Find out what the interview is going to be about**

Often media representatives are willing to share the basics of the story they are working on in advance. Some will even offer their questions in advance, but if they do not, then at least ask them to give you as specific an idea as possible what they would like to discuss.

Any insight you are offered by the media representative will help to prepare yourself for the interview.

### **The most important things are...**

1. **What interview is about and what questions you are going to be asked?**
2. In the case of radio or TV, if the interview is **live or pre-recorded** (edited or unedited)?
3. In all cases, what the **end product** will be (e.g. a 1,000 word article for print/online media, or a 2-minute interview for TV, etc.?)

If you are asked for a comment or statement here and now, without prior notice, let the media representative understand that you are willing to assist - also on this short notice, but that you will need to verify your response with your organisation. Ask if you can call back. Again, before you hang up, take time to ask the media representative a few questions (see box on previous page).

Do not respond by saying “No comments!” - even if this the case at the moment.

### **Next step: Take advice from your media adviser**

The next thing to do, if you are not a member of the Press and Public Affairs staff, is to get in touch with one of the media advisers in your organisation to seek their advice.

They are skilled in media interaction and will guide you in developing key messages or statements that explain your organisation’s position on a particular issue, situation or incident. They will also assist in collating the necessary facts and back-ground information, which you will need to prepare for the media interaction.



# What do you want to say?

**Successful communication is about saying the right things, at the right time, to the right people. So, how do you develop the right key messages?**

Before focusing on how you can best say what you want to say, it is necessary to develop, refine and test your *key messages*. They will form the core of your response to media enquiries and will eventually explain your organisation's position on a particular issue, situation or incident.

*Crisis Communication* is slightly different from general everyday communication. Whereas this chapter will focus on everyday communication, three separate chapters (pages 27-32) will detail various aspects of Crisis Communication.

## **What well-prepared key messages can do**

- Explain the main points, you want your audience to hear, understand, and remember.
- Clarify the situation and provide the takeaway headline (the overarching message) of the issue you want to communicate.
- Summarise and articulate in bite-sized statements:
  - What your organisation is doing about a problem, situation or incident, how you do it, and what difference or value it brings to the audience.
  - What your organisation's position is on a matter or issue, why this is your position, and how the matter or issue will be resolved or why not?

## **Developing your key messages**

One of the most efficient ways to develop key messages is to brainstorm. Work with your organisation's Press and Public Affairs staff to facilitate a brainstorm session. If the topic involves an extremely sensitive, complicated or highly technical subject, invite a Subject Matter Expert to assist in transforming the information into understandable terms. Include other relevant internal stakeholders, ideally also those who ultimately have the authority to approve the key messages.

Before the brainstorm, gather information that will assist the development process:

- Identify your organisations communication objectives (from your organisation's Communication Strategy). Your key messages must support these objectives.
- Identify your messaging needs. Are they short term, i.e. addressing a specific issue, situation or incident, or are they longer-term, or a combination of several topics?
- Identify the challenges, problems and barriers. Shape your key messages around these issues.
- Consider the people in your target audience. What do they need and want to hear from you?

The media adviser facilitating the brainstorm session is responsible for capturing essential words, phrases and explanations that can be used to develop the key messages. Limit the number of key messages to three, maximum five, concise bite-size statements.

Avoid using organisational jargon or acronyms. They confuse the audience will switch them off.

### **Testing and refining your key messages**

Once your draft key messages are ready, read them out loud. Do they sound conversational? Refine the wording or simplify the language if needed. Ask yourself the following questions:

- What is the overarching message - is it clear?
- Is it believable? Can it be supported by evidence?
- Is the language simple and easy to understand?
- Is this what you want to say to the people in your target audience?
- Why is this overarching message important to them?
- Does the overarching message address the challenges, problems or barriers? Is it purposeful?
- What is in it for the target audience? Will they buy-in on your overarching message?
- Does it represent your agenda appropriately?
- Does it achieve empathy?

Check your key message for accuracy and establish supporting points for each of your key messages. Supporting data document facts, present figures or statistics; quote other authorities, or convey stories. Using visuals can also be effective.

If you have time, test the key messages to ensure that they resonate with internal and external audiences. If possible include people in your target audience in the test. Incorporate their feedback.

Work with your organisation's Press and Public Affairs staff to have the final, refined key messages approved for release.

### **Not always a must**

Whereas key messages are indispensable if you are responding to a specific issue, situation or incident, there can be interview situations where key messages are not mandatory. This could be an interview with a newspaper or magazine for an in-depth or feature article or if you are invited to join a radio programme focusing on e.g. road traffic safety.

However, in principle, any interview situation is usually an opportunity to deliver your organisation's key messages.

# Getting ready for the interview!

**In preparation for your interview, here are a few important points to know and issues to consider.**

In some cases, the interview will be given by a senior official. In other cases, it will be given by a spokesperson who will represent the organisation. The spokesperson can be the organisation's media adviser (e.g. a press officer or press secretary) or, if the subject is sensitive, complicated or highly technical, a Subject Matter Expert, appointed as the spokesperson.

If you are the spokesperson, the media adviser or a member of the Press and Public Affairs staff, will guide and coach you before and during the interview. Here are some of the things it will be useful to consider before the interview.

## **Declining the interview**

Your organisation can always politely decline an interview. Ideally, the rejection should be accompanied by a reason, but this is not a requirement.

## **Know the interviewer**

The media adviser will collate relevant information about the interviewer/media representative and the media outlet he or she is working for. Ideally, this will include previous coverage of your organisation and - if possible - who else the media representative has been speaking on the topic(s) of the interview.

## **Timing, format and publishing**

Before the interview, the media adviser will know the time for an approximate duration of the interview. If the interview requires you to travel to the media outlet's studio, allow plenty of time for the unexpected (traffic, parking, etc.) to arrive early.

The media adviser will also know the format of the interview. For broadcast interviews, if it will be live or recorded (unedited or edited) - and for what programme it is intended. Will it be used for podcasts? Will it be transcribed?

For print interviews, the media adviser will have an idea of the scope of the article. The media adviser will also know, when and where the interview is planned to be aired or published.

### **Interview questions**

The media adviser will know the main topic(s) of the interview and may have obtained the full list of interview questions. However, it must be anticipated that the media representative will ask you questions that are not listed. If the media representative will not share the full list of questions, he or she might instead share the opening question(s). This will ensure a smoother start of the interview for both the media representative and you.

### **Rehearsal and coaching**

The media adviser will offer to rehearse the interview with you and offer guidance and advice. Even basic rehearsal enhances your appearance and prepares you to address the audience in a more comfortable, positive and convincing way. It also prepares you to deliver your key messages and respond more effectively to questions.

### **Delivering your key messages**

The essential thing is to deliver your key messages. To get them across during the interview, you will benefit from rehearsing the key messages and practice them in brief statements. Alternatively, memorise keywords and bullet points to deliver memorable soundbites (typically they are 10 to 20 seconds long). Review supporting facts and figures so you are comfortable discussing them.

### **How you want to be identified**

Before the interview, the media adviser will inform the media representative how you would prefer to be identified. This will include your name (spelled right), title/rank, department and organisation.

# Universal tips for all interviews

**Perception is everything. The success of your interview depends on how the audience perceives your performance.**

When you first meet the interviewer (before the actual interview begins), offer a handshake. A handshake gives a good first impression, of course depending on local cultural norms. During the interview, the essential thing is to stick to your key messages. Stay focused. Talk in soundbites. Stay on topic and do not speculate uncertainties. Avoid personal opinions. Never say something you don't want to be published.

If you are using written notes as an aide, use only “trigger” words because too many words on a page will distract you. The message needs to come directly from your head.

## **Expression and body language**

- Establish eye contact with the interviewer.
- Smile. A smile is a simple and instant way of showing positive body language.
- Use gestures to complement the delivery of your message or to underline your points or statements.
- Do not nod your head up and down as if to say yes, when you are asked a question. It can look that as if you agree with the interviewer, despite you do just the opposite.

## **Voice**

- Show enthusiasm when you speak. Enthusiasm is contagious.
- Use vocal variety. Vary the tones of your voice to create interest and match your topic.
- Speak at a slightly slower pace, than you would in a conversation, to underline key points.

## **Language**

- Be concise. Use single, clear sentences to make your point.
- Keep your language as simple as possible. Never use a long word where a short one will do. Avoid long explanations.
- Do not use organisational jargon or acronyms.

- Do not over answer. Stick to your messages and stop talking when you have answered the question.
- Do not interrupt.
- Use visualisation (in particular in radio interviews, you can paint a picture for the listener).

### **Responding to questions**

- Focus on understanding the question, rather than rehearsing your response in your head.
- Wait for the interviewer to finish asking the question before you respond.
- Just before you start talking, pause and give yourself a moment to structure your response, make eye contact and smile.
- If relevant, use a bridging statement (see page 15) to deliver your key messages.
- If asked about a problem, talk about a solution.
- Try not to use verbal fillers such as “ummm...”, “you know...”.
- Don’t answer hypothetical questions. Simply answer: “I really cannot respond to a hypothetical question like this”.
- The interviewer may leave a space of silence after you have finished responding to a question. This is done to draw unintended remarks out of you. Remain quiet after your answer, or say: “That is the main point. What other questions can I answer for you?”

### **Rectify incorrect information**

- If you make an error, correct yourself as soon as possible.
- If the interviewer gives incorrect information, do not repeat it. Instead, correct inaccuracies politely with “That is not true, the facts are ...”
- Do not argue or get into heated arguments with the interviewer.

### **If you don’t know the answer**

- If you do not have an answer or the question relates to a subject which you cannot speak about, you can answer: “I’m sorry but I don’t have enough information at hand to comment at this time. I am sure that we will let you know as soon as we have enough information to give you an accurate picture”.

# Bridging your way to a successful interview

Whereas the interviewer has his agenda, you have yours. The bridging technique will help you get your points across during the interview.

The essential thing during the interview, is to deliver your key messages. If possible repeat your key messages several times during the interview.

Perhaps you will get your points across by answering the interviewers' questions. If not, you will have to use a technique to bridge the question to allow you to deliver your key messages. This is called a *bridging statement*.

You should not avoid questions which deserve an answer, but answer the question briefly and then *bridge* to your message. In this way you will be able to better control the interview and get it back onto your agenda.

## Bridging statement

A bridging statement is a transition from one topic (based on the interviewers question) to the subject you want to talk about (your message).

## The ABC to bridging

A method to remember this technique is the A-B-C: *Acknowledge - Bridge - Communicate*.

When asked a question, you 'Acknowledge' the question, then 'Bridge' using a bridging statement and 'Communicate' one of your key messages.

Acknowledge	Bridge	Communicate
That might well be the case in that situation, but...	...it's different from the situation we have here today, where we...	...Key Message
I'm not familiar with the details of the survey you refer to, so I really can't comment on it, but...	...our experience in similar areas clearly shows that...	...Key Message



As you will understand, I cannot share any specifics yet about the situation, but...	...what I can tell you is that our entire team is working dedicated to...	...Key Message
That is a relevant point to address, but ...	...equally important is the...	...Key Message

### More bridging statements

‘Bridging’ is the most central part of using this technique. Try to turn the question around delicately and gently, so the focus shifts to one of your key messages and, at the same time, away from what the interviewer wants to talk about. Some of these bridging statements might also be:

- The fact is...
- That reminds me...
- What that means is...
- Let me just add that...
- The real issue here is...
- What is most important is...
- Another thing to remember is...
- Let me answer you by saying that...
- If you look at it closely, you will find...
- Let me re-emphasize something I said earlier about...
- That is not my area of expertise, but I think your audience would be interested in knowing that...

# Different types of interviews and their characteristics...

Each interview type has its own characteristics. Here are some tips for each type.

Whereas almost all media interviews can be done in-person, some can be done either in-person or remotely. TV interviews via Skype or similar applications are conducted remotely. In the following section, you will be introduced to the best practices for each of the categories.



## Interviews conducted in-person

- TV
- Doorstep
- Press Conferences

## Interviews conducted either or

- Radio
- Print
- Online

## Interviews conducted remotely

- TV via Skype/FaceTime



## TV interviews

The TV interview belongs to a unique type, as it offers you the opportunity to be seen in person rather than sharing your message in a press release.

On TV, you will be able to engage the people in your target audience more effectively as you can support your messaging using body language, gestures, and tone of voice.

The downside is that there is little chance that any comment, which you may make and later regret, will be edited out.

### **Eye contact, eye contact, eye contact!**

A TV interview is similar to a conversation between two individuals. Making eye contact with the interviewer and maintaining it in a natural way shows strength and integrity. The lack of eye contact can give an impression of nervousness and defensiveness.

- **If you are being interviewed in a studio** or on location, make eye contact with the interviewer. Do not look into the camera.
- **If you are being interviewed in a remote location** and the interviewer is in the studio or somewhere else, look straight into the camera.

Regardless of the format, you should lock your eyes at the interviewer or the camera and never let go. We often look away (either up, to the side, or down) when we retrieve information from our brain. Try not to look away.

### **Posture**

- **If you are standing**, stand firmly, with your body directly centred over your feet. To avoid moving from side to side unintentionally, you can place one foot slightly in front of the other.
- **If you are sitting**, do not slump into the chair. Lean forward so you sit on the front half of the chair. It helps to display your energy and ensure that the camera's main focus is on your face, not your body.

### **Stay calm under attack**

In some interviews, you might experience the feeling of being attacked by an opponent, a panel member or the interviewer. TV people love "reaction shots" of your expression or body language when someone else is verbally attacking you. Stay calm. Take a deep breath before you engage. And remember... you are always potentially on camera, even if someone else is talking.

### **What to wear and not to wear on TV?**

- Dress appropriately.
- Women should avoid wearing short skirts and clothing with horizontal stripes or small prints. Keep jewellery to a minimum. Avoid jewellery that reflects light or makes noise.
- Men should wear socks long enough to avoid a gap between the trouser legs and the top of the socks when crossing one leg over the other.
- If offered makeup, accept it to avoid shins. Makeup for women should be only slightly heavier than normally worn.
- Eyeglasses can produce glare, so wear contacts if possible.

## Doorstep interviews

As the name indicates, doorstep interviews typically take place at the doorstep of a conference room or a building where media representatives have gathered outside to get a statement or comment from an official, following an event, incident or important decision. The interview is not planned but can in some cases be anticipated.

The unexpected gathering of media representatives can be perceived as uncomfortable and sometimes hostile, but avoid the temptation to ignore the crowd, to flee or to say “no comments”.

You need to gain control of the situation. Often the media representatives just need a brief soundbite, so stop and give them one.

### **Get ready...**

Take a moment to clear your head and calm your breathing. Pay attention to your body language. Blocking cameras with your hand or shoving journalists out of the way creates a distinct impression of someone with something to hide.

### **...and keep it ultra-short**

Remember you are providing a soundbite, not conducting a full-scale interview, so keep it short and close down the opportunity for follow-up questions.

- **If you have issued a statement** refer to it and say that at for now there is nothing new to add.
- **If you haven't issued a statement** you can deliver your soundbite in 20 seconds and then leave: “I can make the following short statement but cannot take any further questions at this time...”.
- **As a minimum**, you can say that you will deliver a short statement shortly and that it would not be appropriate to comment further at this stage.
- **If a tragic event has occurred**, acknowledge that and show empathy (see the chapter on Crisis Communication on page 31).

### **Be polite always**

As well as you have your job to do, media representatives have theirs to do. If you come across as irritable or defensive it can reflect badly on you. Stay calm, confident and in control, even if some media representatives may seem to be provoking you.

## **Press conferences**

A press conference is a media event organised to distribute official information from the organisation and answer questions from the media. Press conferences can also be organised in response to a particular issue, situation or incident.

Press conferences are normally led by a senior official, who will act as the organisation's spokesperson. He or she can be seconded by Subject Matter Experts if the topic involves an extremely sensitive, complicated or highly technical subject.

Commonly press conferences are moderated by a *moderator*, typically the media adviser, whose role it is to welcome the media representatives, explain how the press conference will be conducted and sequenced, including if there will or will not be an opportunity for questions. The moderator also introduces the spokesperson.

### **Preparing the spokesperson**

In preparing the spokesperson for the press conference, the moderator will:

- Introduce the spokesperson to the format of the press conference and how it is sequenced.
- Walk the spokesperson through his/her opening statement, speaking notes or talking points.
- Discuss how much time will be allowed for questions.
- If pre-registration for the press conference is required, make the list of attending media representatives available.
- Familiarise the spokesperson with the visual aids and rehearse his/her visual presentation and cues for the opening statement.
- Familiarise the Spokesperson with Information Kits or handouts.

### **Sequence of the press conference**

1. Moderators' introduction (welcome, sequence, procedures, and introduction of the spokesperson).
2. Spokespersons short greeting and purpose of the press conference.
3. Spokespersons opening statement (which is the body of the presentation and includes the key messages, facts (and the 5 W's (Who, What, When, Where, Why) if appropriate). In the

- event of a tragedy, show empathy and emphasise caring and competence.
4. Conclusion and summary (reiterate and reinforce the key messages).
  5. Moderator opens the Question & Answer session

### **Rehearsal of Questions & Answers**

The moderator will develop anticipated questions based on the content of the opening statement, on related topics not covered in the opening statement, and on the current situation. It is advisable to include:

- Five "Good" questions - what you want the public to know.
- Five "Tough" questions - problem areas, issues for which you don't have answers.
- Questions on the organisations position (key messages). How will people in the target audience understand this position?
- Answers to the anticipated Questions.

Submit the Questions & Answers for review by the spokesperson.

### **Radio interviews**

The radio interview is a short-lived moment of sound. Radio is not the medium for complex explanations or statistics. Your audience must be able to grasp your point instantly as there is no visual reinforcement to back your message.

The radio interview can take place in a studio, on location (outdoors or in your office) or by phone. Most often, the interview will be recorded and edited before it is broadcasted, but in some cases, it might be live.

### **Radio is the personal medium**

The main characteristic of radio is, that it is a personal medium. A radio interview gives the illusion of a conversation with a friend and not a conversation with thousands. In radio, you are talking with people, not to them.

Adopt a friendly approach in radio interviews. Smile - when you smile your voice smiles and it comes across more appealing and personable to the listeners.

To be sure you make yourself understood, speak clearly and slightly slower than you would normally.

**For short interviews, be brief and to the point**  
Know the length of the interview. If it is a short interview, a few soundbites may be enough. Speak in short sentences and cite your key messages briefly and simply.

**For longer interviews, paint a picture**  
Instead of reinforcing your message by visual means, you can paint a picture for the listeners. Prepare colourful cases to enhance your key messages. Use local or personal examples or use engaging human stories to show that you care and have first-hand experience. Such cases will build your credibility, show that you are human, and add to building trust and confidence in your communities.

### **On radio you can...**

- ...bring and **use notes** of your key messages, cases, examples, etc.
- ...**use your voice** to create variety and interest - no monotones.
- ...**have a glass of water** next to you soothe your throat if needed.

## **Print interviews for newspapers or magazines**

Interviews for print media can take place face-to-face, by phone or through the exchange of email correspondence.

Media representatives are extremely busy and always on deadline, so when they take the time to meet you face-to-face and speak with you in person, it's a definite positive.

For face-to-face and phone interviews your preparation and interaction should follow the principles laid out previously in this Compendium.

### **Tips for print media interviews**

- Keep your notes at your fingertips.
- Assume that everything you say will be reported, whether it is said before, during, or after an interview.
- If you are unhappy with the way you have phrased something, stop, rephrase, rectify and/or clarify.
- If you realise after the interview that you misstated a fact or phrased something poorly, call or send an email to the media representative to correct and rectify.

If time for a face-to-face or phone interview cannot be found, the media representative may instead compile a set of questions and send them by email directly to you or your Press and Public Affairs staff.

### **Work with your media adviser to develop answers**

Your media adviser will work with you to compose a written response. You then have the opportunity to shape and draft your answers in a way that ensures an adequate response.

Once your answers are ready, you or your media adviser will send them to the media outlet, after which the piece will be published in the same way as any other interview.

### **Offer a follow-up call**

When you submit your response, you can offer a follow-up call to clarify or discuss any question the media representative may have.

If you remain available and open to answering additional questions, it will both ensure the accuracy of the story and allow you to strengthen your relationship with the media representative.

The media representative may also call you to review a single fact or email you a key section of the article for review.

### **You cannot ‘approve’ a story**

You may end the interview session by offering to review your specific quotes to ensure accuracy. Otherwise, media representatives have no obligation to share their final story with you. You cannot ‘approve’ the final piece in advance, so don’t ask.

### **But you can offer to fact check the story**

Instead, you can offer to fact check the story. This is different than requesting to see a story before it is being published. Making yourself available to check the key facts of the article is usually regarded as helpful.

## **Skype interviews**

As computers become more powerful and Internet speeds increase, many media outlets are turning to Skype or similar applications to conduct their interviews.

However new technology brings new challenges. To make sure you look and sound your best, consider these tips when planning to give a TV interview via Skype from your office or home.



### **Prepare your surroundings**

Pick a quiet place and consider what people will see behind you. Choose a neutral backdrop and remove anything distracting, so you will be the focal point on the screen.

### **Avoid interruptions**

If you are giving the interview at work with multiple people around you, be sure to let everyone in the office know ahead of time that you will be in an interview.

### **Set the right camera level**

Set your camera at eye level. It will not be noticed if you place your laptop on a stack of books to get the level right. The camera should point directly at your face, not upwards from a lower position e.g. on a desk.

### **Use lights**

Place a light behind your camera. Light from behind you will put your face in the dark. Light beside or above you will cast strange shadows. The best place to put your light source is right behind your camera.

### **Use a clip-on microphone**

Ask your media adviser for a clip-on microphone this will pick up much better sound from a few inches below your collar. The small cable can be slipped inside your jacket.

### **Look into the camera**

Look directly into the camera. If the screen is below the camera, you may find yourself looking down at the screen, and not into the camera. Look directly into the video camera and don't let your eyes wander.

### **Practice with colleague**

Ahead of time, do a Skype test run with a colleague at a different location to ensure that everything is working as it should. Ensure that your Internet is fast enough to transmit video. Practice to look into the camera and not on the screen.

**Avoid distraction**

You don't want to be distracted. Turn off your cell phone and close all other programs on your computer during the interview.

**Arrive early to the Skype interview**

You never know when a technical bug or an unexpected audio problem will come up. Skype is free, so dial in as early as the studio will accommodate and just hang out waiting to start.

**Online interviews**

It is highly likely that interviews given to any traditional media will also be published on social and online platforms, and disseminated through other digital communication channels.

Don't forget that articles will be made available forever in online archives, radio interviews will remain available as podcasts and TV Channels will upload news and features for online streaming.

# Learn from your experience

**Over time, your media interaction skills will improve. Your best teacher is your last mistake...**

The key to continuously improving your media interaction skills is to evaluate the outcome and impact of each interview - did it achieve what was intended, did it accomplish the objectives, were the key messages delivered? Is there space for improvements?

All interviews, but in particular radio and TV interviews, should be evaluated to establish your progress and identify shortfalls. Get hold of your radio or TV interviews and keep them - listen back or watch them.

- Be critical of your performance, assess what went well and what you might do better next time.
- Ask for honest feedback from your media adviser (don't just ask friends). Remember feedback is a gift, not a threat, it will help you grow.
- Listen to other interviews by other spokespersons, how did they answer questions?
- The more interviews you do the more confident you will become - so do not avoid interviews. Embrace them as opportunities to get good stories and messages across to our audiences and stakeholders.

# Planning for communication during a crisis

**Crisis communication belongs to the most difficult and demanding communication skills. As communication practitioner, you need to be prepared.**

The principles for crisis communication mirror the principles for everyday communication, but whereas ongoing everyday communication in most cases is proactive and strategic, crisis communication is reactive to unexpected, unfolding events.

Crisis happen all the time, in the business world and the public sector. They will continue to happen whether they are natural disasters, corruption, and fraud, company cover-ups, negligent police response, accidents, or the death and injury of people, by whatever means.

A situation can escalate from what might seem a relatively small scale incident and become critical if the potential risk and impact are not assessed and understood at the outset.

The capability of staff to identify and report potentially critical incidents will help organisations to ensure that early interventions and actions are put in place, which can prevent the situation to escalate.

Unfortunately, many organisations are still taken by surprise when they are hit by a crisis. Planning is essential if the organisation is to stand a chance of surviving any kind of crisis.

## **Timely response is counted in minutes, not hours**

In the event of an escalating crisis, your organisation must be able to provide a timely response to limit potential reputational damage, by providing clear messages to both the media and the public.

It may take a while to recover from a crisis, but if handled well from the outset, any longer-term damage can be avoided and reputation restored. There is also an argument that by handling a crisis well, reputations can actually be enhanced, so the crisis could also be an opportunity, as well as a threat.

The older more traditional responses of hanging back and gathering all the information have passed us by. With the mushrooming use of social media, there is an ever-increasing need to quickly get messages out. Crisis communication has become a matter of response speed to take control of the situation before others take control of it for you.

Within minutes, both the public and the media will be tweeting live and videos will go viral before some organisations even know themselves what happened to them.

### **Sound values and ethics will help you through a crisis**

An organisation's commitment to sound values and ethical principles builds its reputation and trust. Greater tolerance and understanding from the media and the public will embrace organisations, which have worked consistently to demonstrate sound values and high ethics in the past.

The issue is that it takes time to establish a strong image and ethos. It cannot be created on the day of the crisis. It is therefore difficult for a spokesperson to convey a positive image of an organisation, if the obvious reality is different

Any claims made on the day of the crisis that does not reflect the reality of the organisation will not be accepted by the greater public.

This is why strong leadership is required from the highest levels to ensure that where the values, ethics, and ethos of an organisation are evidently poor, it must be addressed and consistently dealt with.

### **Assess your risks and prepare for the crisis**

There will always be a risk of an unexpected incident or event which nobody could have predicted or seen coming. There are, however many situations that with a certain probability can be foreseen, assessed and planned for.

A chief executive of a logistics company should be prepared to manage the crisis if a train is derailed, a truck crashes or a vessel sinks. In the food industry, managements might expect product contamination or recall of a food line, for example, if horse meat is being sold as beef.

In the public sector, the crises can relate to inappropriate responses to serious crimes, failed investigations, major incidents or, as happens all too often in Ukraine, corruption.

The media and the public will want to know why things went wrong, who can be blamed and what is done about it!

It is also important to realise that the actions, attitudes, and behaviour of staff internally can also lead to a crisis. Issues around inhumane treatment and sexual harassment, for example, can trigger a crisis and lead to loss of reputation and trust in communities.

Organisations should ask themselves what they might be at risk from and list as many of the scenarios, which can reasonably be foreseen.

### **Develop your crisis management plan**

Responses to the foreseen scenarios can be planned in advance. This process can take place through the work of a *crisis management team* which will develop, draft and maintain a *crisis management plan*.

Members of the Press and Public Affairs staff, typically the media adviser(s), will form part of the crisis management team to work with crisis communication-related issues of the plan. The key objective of crisis communication is to protect the reputation of the organisation and its senior officials. A crisis brings a high risk of reputation of both at stake. In this context, crisis communication plays a vital role in managing the crisis and mitigating negative public exposure,

Being as prepared as possible is therefore fundamental to the organisation as well as to its senior officials.

### **Anticipate, prepare and rehearse**

The maxim is '*anticipate - prepare - rehearse*'. The crisis management plan including its crisis communication section is likely to comprise a *response matrix* detailing how to deal with a variety of major and critical incidents.

However, having a theoretical crisis management plan on the shelf will not cut it. If it is not thoroughly tested, it will not survive contact with the public. Consequently, regular realistic scenario-based training sessions will be fundamental to the successful implementation of the plan. The training should be tough and challenging, but always achievable.

The purpose of the trainings is to get teams and individuals to make as many mistakes as possible, in the training environment. The lessons learned and gaps identified, will form the basis of

revisions of the plan and the organisation's response to a crisis. The plan will always be a dynamic document, which will need to be refreshed after each training session.

The training sessions will include realistically staged interviews, social media messaging, press releases and press conferences. Press and Public Affairs staff will act as advisers to senior officials who will be trained in the delivery of statements and key messages and tested as spokespersons to ensure effective message delivery as various incidents of significance unfold.

### **Plan nationally, not just for the headquarters**

The crisis management plan should be further developed to comprise guidance and responses to incidents and crises taking place in remote locations, away from the headquarters.

Trained staff members at regional sites and locations should know exactly what to do and whom to contact if the incident happens at their location or within their area of responsibility.

Any delays and communication breakdown between the headquarters and other locations will lead to speculation and the reporting of poor planning and response. This means that the headquarters and its senior officials will be on the back foot from the outset, trying to catch up, which looks bad.

# Crisis communication principles

On this page and the following, you will find an additional few important points to consider when you are communicating during the phases of a crisis.

Whereas many of the principles for communicating in a crisis situation follow the general guidelines laid out in the previous chapters, there are some additional important points pertaining to crisis communication:

- Don't delay and don't deny.
- Time matters - early statements and tweets are important.
- Be proactive to mitigate the impact: stop speculation and myths.
- If the media do not get information quickly they will either make it up or get others to fill the gaps which you are creating.
- Confirm the obvious.
- Tell the truth and tell it quickly - but be moderate. You do not always have to unleash the whole truth at once.
- An apology is not an admission of guilt and will take you a long way in demonstrating understanding, openness, and transparency.

## **Conduct post incident reviews after each incident**

Following any actual incident or crisis, a full and thorough debrief should be undertaken and in the same way lessons are learned and captured during trainings.

All relevant lessons identified during the incident should be captured.

This learning will be fed back into the crisis management plan and the lessons shared.



# BBC's checklist for crisis communication

The BBC teaches this basic structure for providing statements, or speaking at a press conference following a major incident, including for example loss of life:

- **Pity** - First of all express sincere condolences to the family and friends of any victims.
- **Praise** - Recognise the response of the staff and any other partner agencies in dealing with the incident.
- **Information** - Give an accurate update of the key events and timeline, if you do not know something say so - do not speculate on causes or make up answers - do signal that the incident or event will have the full weight of the organisation behind it and all the resources necessary, will be made available.
- **Reassure** - Communities will need to know that you are taking this seriously and that all is been done that should be done, as above under information. Also, they need reassurance that they are safe and that the incident is under control with no risks on-going. If there is any security or safety advice, give it out, along with contact details for more information by telephone or on the website.
- **Appeal** - If there is an opportunity to appeal then do so, i.e. valuable witnesses to events or incidents that could support any inquiry or criminal investigation.
- **Pledge** - Explain that following any inquiry or investigation, any lessons that have been learned will be put into practice, to prevent similar failings in the future.

