



THE UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

**Franklin College  
of Arts and Sciences**

## **Media Interview Tip Sheet**

Working with the media is an effective way to reach a large audience. The following tips will help maximize the likelihood that your intended message gets across. If you have questions or need help preparing for an interview, contact Sam Fahmy at 706/542-6049 or [sfahmy@uga.edu](mailto:sfahmy@uga.edu).

### **Prepare**

Anticipate questions in advance and be ready with concise, jargon-free answers. If a reporter calls unannounced, it's ok to say that you're busy at the moment, but will call him/her back in 15 minutes. Use this time to prepare.

### **Identify (and repeat) key points**

Define no more than three key points that you'd like to get across in the interview and then craft a one or two sentence sound bite that effectively gets each point across. During the interview, keep circling back to these key points to increase the likelihood that the reporter will get the big picture.

### **Relax**

Most interviews are informational rather than confrontational. If you feel like the questions that you're encountering are hostile, circle back to your key points and/or cordially end the interview.

### **Don't speculate or say "no comment"**

In an attempt to be helpful, people often speculate or guess at answers. It's ok to say, "that's outside of my expertise," or "I don't have that information now, but can get back to you." Avoid "no comment," which sounds evasive. Instead, explain why you cannot comment (e.g. confidential personnel matters, student records, intellectual property, etc.)

### **"Off the record"**

Exactly what is and is not "off the record," can be misinterpreted by either party, so don't say anything to a reporter that you wouldn't want to see in print or on TV. Keep in mind that the interview is never "over" until you and the reporter part company. Offhand comments made to a reporter can and do make it into print or on the air.

### **Remember your audience**

Approximately 25% of adult U.S. population holds a bachelor's degree, while only 3% hold doctoral degrees. With this in mind, avoid jargon, lengthy explanations and unnecessary detail. Analogies or anecdotes often can help audiences understand. Remember that simple messages are memorable ones.

### **Silence can be golden**

Brief answers are best. There's a natural tendency to fill in gaps in conversations, and many interviewees keep talking well after they've answered the question. This can take the interview on a tangent that makes it more likely the story will stray from your key messages.

### **Respect the reporter's deadline**

With the advent of nearly constant news, deadlines for reporters are more urgent than ever. Respond to reporters as quickly as possible, even if the best you can do is refer them to another source who might be more well-versed in the subject matter.

### **You often don't get a chance to review a story before publication**

Some reporters will allow you to review your quotes for accuracy, but many do not. (They believe that sharing a story before publication compromises their credibility as an impartial, objective source of information.) One thing you can always do is let the reporter know that s/he is welcome to contact you if s/he has any follow-up questions or needs to fact-check.