

# Media Interviews: Tips & Tricks

Presented by James Quirk

# How to Interview Like a Pro



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# Why Your Comms Manager Is Step One

1. We'll help you prepare and shape messaging
2. We typically know the reporters and the outlets, and we know the best ways to respond
3. We track media outreach and conduct follow-ups





# The Audience and the Objective





# But First...

*Off the record* means the reporter can't run anything you've said. We strongly advise you to never go off the record with a reporter – let your comms manager do that.

*On background* means the reporter can use what you're saying without attribution. This is useful to explain complex topics to a reporter, or fill them in on the history of an issue.

By default, the second you start speaking to a reporter, you're *on the record*.

# The Reporter as Conduit


- Don't concentrate so much on the reporter as you do their audience.
- How can you best tailor your key messages to the people who will read/listen to what the reporter creates?
- While a good rapport with reporters is important, the key is the access to a specific audience.

# The Example of Jeff Tittel



NEW JERSEY

## *The Sierra Club's Gadfly in the Age of Hardball*

 Give this article



By Josh Benson

June 26, 2005

TRENTON - THERE he is, skewering Bradley M. Campbell, the state's environmental commissioner as a "pander bear." Or referring to pharmaceutically tainted waters as "Viagra Falls." Or dismissing Acting Gov. Richard J. Codey's State of the State address as "his 15 minutes of fame" before an inevitable decline.

Yes, it would have been difficult for even the most casual consumers of New Jersey news in recent years to avoid coming across the name Jeff Tittel.

Who is this Mr. Tittel, one may ask, and who appointed him expert on everything?

As Mr. Tittel explains it, his ubiquity is simply a function of his will to be heard.

"People expect us to take what we're given and then get out of the way," he said in a recent interview, conducted in a hearing room at the State House that he uses when the Legislature is in session. "But we don't have the ability to stop bad things, or to make good things happen, by being quiet."

# Rule #1:





# Avoid Jargon!



**Keep**  
**It**  
**Simple**  
**Stupid**





# Repetition, Repetition



Vs.



# Be Loud and Clear







# Tips & Tricks - Prep

Know your top 1-3 talking points (no more than 3!)

- o All supporting your main message and directed at your target audience
- o Have stories, anecdotes, and a few simple facts ready to support your key points
- o Anticipate likely questions – write them down and craft answers
  - Practice, practice, practice
- o Always prepare rather than wing it
- o Talk to yourself out loud
- o Know your message so well that it doesn't sound rehearsed or robotic when you speak
  - Find your space
- o Block time on your calendar so you don't feel rushed and can focus on the interview
- o Find a quiet space
- o If possible, take phone interviews from a landline for a smoother connection
- o For video interviews, use computer rather than phone for better quality and connection
- o Remove distractions – silence phones, email notifications, etc.
- o Have a glass of water nearby to prevent dry mouth

# Tips & Tricks

- o Say what you want to say, then stop! Don't babble on and say things you may regret.
- o Flag key points so the reporter and audience know what you're saying is important
  - "The most important thing for people to know..." OR "The main point is..."
- o Use bridging techniques to transition to what you want to say
  - "Before I answer that question, let me just say..." OR "An important question you haven't asked yet is..."
- Start with your strongest statement.
- Pair data and statistics with analogies – create an image for the audience.
- Tell stories or use anecdotes to be more memorable.
- Be positive, show your passion, and offer solutions.

# How Reporters Construct Stories



- Reporters typically “plug in” quotes where necessary in stories. Knowing how your voice will be inserted into a story is important in formulating response.
- Reporters try to quote “both sides” on topics where there might be a difference of opinion. Be aware of instances where WRA will be used as a “foil” in a story. If our voice is likely to counter another’s, how do we want that to appear?
- Give a reporter all the info they need for enterprise stories. Conversely, be ready for short and quick responses for “react” or quick-turnaround stories.

# Prepping for Reacts

For a react story - something happened, and the reporter is looking for comment about it - anticipate these types of questions:

- How do we feel about what happened?
- Do we agree, disagree?
- Are we disappointed?
- Were we surprised?
- What happens next?
- What might the consequences be?





# Enterprise Reporting 101

- Enterprise reporting, also known as investigative journalism, is typically self-directed by a journalist. This means the story didn't originate from a press release or a news event. It *can* be spurred by a pitch, but often isn't.
- Enterprise is usually the realm of more experienced reporters.
- Data and analysis are critical to most enterprise stories. So is insider or expert perspective.
- Comms will help you prep for these interviews, but be prepared for unexpected questions. Remember that it's okay to not know an answer.

The Goal:  
Avoid This -  
>



# Helpful Resources

**Check the Hub!**

- 1. Interview prep sheet**
- 2. Bridging phrases cheat sheet**
- 3. Media training info**