

Media Relations Tips

What To Do When a Reporter Calls

CSU faculty and staff are encouraged to respond promptly to media requests, even if only to refer a caller to Strategic Communication + Marketing at 706-507-8720. Reporters are often subject to deadlines, and a delay of even an hour could mean the difference between favorable coverage and a lost opportunity or a reporter disinclined to turn to CSU for help in the future. Your courtesy will help CSU now and in the future.

Before the Interview

Develop concise answers to a few key questions:

- What is the main point you want to make? Why is it important?
- Why is the reporter calling you?
- What makes your input on this topic interesting?
- Are you the correct person to answer the questions? For example, are you going to be asked for the university's position on a sensitive topic?
- Who will benefit and how?
- What is your main objective? If you could make only two points with this story, what would they be?
- Have you gathered any printed materials, photos or other visuals to share with the reporter?

During the Interview

- Ask what type of story the reporter is pursuing and the context in which you will be quoted.
- Repeat your main points at least twice.
- Keep your statements clear and concise. Use plain-language interpretations and metaphors. Avoid jargon.
- Speak slowly and spell difficult words or names.
- Assume everything you say will be quoted. If you feel commenting is inappropriate, will misrepresent your stance, will get you in trouble or is outside your area of expertise, politely decline.
- If you don't know the answer to a question, it's fine to say so. (You may direct them to someone else who does know or to Strategic Communication + Marketing for help.)
- Beware of going "off the record." This term is too often misinterpreted.
- Don't limit yourself to answering questions. Raise points that you think are important.
- In responding to a question, it's fine to move back to a point you want to make. For example, *"That's an interesting perspective, but what we really need to emphasize is that..."*
- Be aware of the interviewing technique where the interviewer leaves "dead time," hoping you'll offer more comments. Say what you want to say, stop talking and wait for the next question.
- Don't hesitate to correct the reporter if he or she makes an inaccurate statement.
- Feel free to object if a question is asked in a manner that suggests the reporter is putting words in your mouth.

After the Interview

- Don't expect to see the story before it is published or aired. Most reporters don't let sources review stories.
- Feel free to call the reporter back with further information or clarification, especially if the interview left you feeling uneasy; it's always good to conclude an interview by trading phone numbers.
- Please notify Strategic Communication + Marketing about any contact you have with the media, any questions or information generated by that contact and any news stories that may result.

Television/Radio Interviews

The same rules apply to broadcast news interviews, but television and radio have their own conventions and limitations. Preparation is still key. Other tips:

- Speak in conversational tones. Don't use technical language or jargon. Assume the listener/viewer is completely unfamiliar with the topic and its relevance to their life. Use anecdotes and metaphors that help simplify the concepts involved.
- Be even more mindful to state your main point simply and concisely. Most "sound bites" are 20 seconds or less.
- Don't create visual distractions with your clothes or appearance. Dress conservatively, as if you were going on a job interview. Check your hair just before going on camera. If seated, don't rock or swivel. If standing, stand still. Animation and enthusiasm are fine if confined to voice and facial expressions.
- Maintain eye contact with the interviewer. Don't look at the camera. Use text-sm, decisive gestures to make points, not big, sweeping motions.
- Don't betray anger in your voice or appearance at an unexpected or hostile question. Simply say you are not prepared to answer the question at this time.
- Avoid the phrase "no comment."
- Try to mention your affiliation with the university in any sound bite. (And make sure the title you give includes "Columbus State University.")