

Unit Introduction

As a military spokesperson working with the media it's important to understand the differing requirements of an on-camera interview verses an interview with a print reporter.

Unlike television reporters who want to know "where's the beef" in 15 seconds or less, print reporters want and need more in-depth information. In addition to the interview itself, print reporters appreciate receiving fact sheets, reports, drawings, on-site visits, demonstrations, etc.

To accommodate the needs of both print and television reporters, reflect on what you learned from the Nature of News unit and what makes a news story. Things like impact, timeliness, sex, proximity, prominence, oddity, suspense, emotion, conflict, current trends and progress should all come to mind. After reflecting on these elements think through how you can effectively tell your story in either the print or television format.

Unit Introduction

It is your responsibility as a PAO to do your homework and ensure that you are prepared to provide the print reporter with a broad array of information related to the story. Likewise, you need to be equally prepared and familiar with the requirements to successfully support on-camera interview requests, such as sound bites and active visuals.

Once you have a firm grasp of how to work with both the print and television reporters you will be well on your way to being able to tell, and sell your organization's stories to the media.



Learning Objectives

- Describe the steps in the interview process for each medium
- Conduct a print interview.
- Conduct a broadcast interview - on-camera and live talk-back.
- Distinguish between live, taped and re-play interviews.

Unit Overview

In this unit we will review:

- Types of interviews
- Initial query
- Feasibility
- Planning
- Preparation
- Rehearsing
- Final preparation
- Pre-interview
- Monitoring the interview
- Post-interview
- Interview assessment

Types of Interviews

There are a variety of types of media interview you should be aware of. Some of these include:

- Telephone interviews. Such interviews are a common practice for print journalists, but are also used by radio and television reporters to obtain information.
- Face-to-face interviews. In this situation the reporter and subject matter expert (SME) engage in dialog to discuss information related to a particular story.



- On-camera standup. This type of interview can either be taped or beamed back to the studio as a live interview.



Types of Interviews

- In studio. This type of interview takes place in a television studio and can either be taped or broadcast live.



- Live Remote. Typically this interview is conducted at the site of the news event and fed back to the station for live broadcast.
- News conference. While you may not think of a news conference as a type of interview, it is when you get to the question and answer phase of the new conference.

Preparing for Media Queries

The process of preparing for and responding to print or electronic media queries is basically the same, but there are also some differences to be aware of to help ensure you effectively communicate your message.

For the purposes of this lesson we will focus on preparing for and handling media requests for print interviews, on-camera stand-up interviews, and group television interviews.

Initial Query

When the phone rings and the reporter on the other end begins to ask questions about something taking place on your installation your first thought should be to grab your media query form and begin filling it out as completely as possible.

Obviously you want to get the pertinent information concerning the reporter such as his/her name, organization, deadline, phone and fax numbers, specific questions and a general idea of what the reporter already knows about the subject. If, during your conversation, you are unsure of what the reporter is really looking for, take the time and ask more questions until you are sure you know precisely what the reporter wants from you. By being sure you know what information the reporter is looking for, you can focus in on exactly what the reporter wants and in turn save yourself the embarrassment of researching and preparing background and responses for the wrong questions.

Should you support the reporter's request?

Before beginning the process of working the query, ask yourself several questions to determine whether or not to respond to the query.

- Is the query answerable at your level? If it is appropriate to respond to the query at your level proceed with gathering the information needed for the response. However, if the subject matter is not answerable at your level you need to pass the query to an appropriate level for a response. If you do pass the query to another level make sure the person you passed it to agrees to accept the query and notify the reporter who will be working it.
- Is the query answerable within security, accuracy, propriety, or policy (SAPP) guidelines? If you determine there will not be a SAPP violation by responding to the query, go ahead and start working the query. If there are SAPP considerations determine what they are and explain them to the reporter. This can be handled when you establish the ground rules for the interview.

Should you support the reporter's request? (Cont)

- What will your organization get out of the story? If you expect fair and balanced reporting of the subject, it is probably in your best interest to respond accurately and in a timely manner to the query. However, keep in mind that if you decide not to respond, you may be passing up an opportunity to present your side of the story. When this happens an information void is created and more than likely someone will fill that void with less than accurate or valid information.
- What are the risks? There is always some risk with reporters not getting the facts correct or their personal agendas showing through. Your job as a PAO is to recognize these potential risks and take the appropriate steps to minimize them.
- Will your comments be used to give balance to the story? Most good journalists strive to write balanced and factually accurate stories. By being cooperative and forthcoming with information your chances of getting balanced coverage are certainly enhanced. If you don't respond, you risk the hazards associated with the information void as discussed above.

Planning the interview and negotiating ground rules

If the query you received results in the need to set up a one-on-one interview with an SME you need to take the appropriate steps to plan for the interview and negotiate the ground rules under which the interview will be conducted.

Negotiating the interview:

- When will the interview take place? Date/time/location?
- Format. One-on-one print interview or stand up television interview (live or taped).
- Duration. How much time does the reporter or SME have available to participate in the interview?
- Everything will be on the record and attributable to the SME
- Who will the reporter be if different from the one filing the query?
- Interviewee. Who have you selected to be the SME?

Other considerations:

- Notify security that a reporter will be coming to the installation.
- Arrange for special parking for the reporter (if needed).
- Identify and brief a media escort (if needed).

Interview preparation

Proper and thorough preparation is essential to any successful interview. Here are some things to consider when preparing for an interview:

- Gather the facts and useful background information relevant to the subject
- Identify and speak with a knowledgeable SME(s)
- Review all PAG relevant to the subject matter
- Brief SME on SAPP considerations
- Develop responses to questions the reporter is likely to ask
- Prepare an opening statement for your SME to answer the reporter's initial questions
- Develop and review command messages with your SME
- Agree upon the labels to be used. Labels often carry special meaning; therefore, it is important to agree upon the appropriate label before the interview. Is it a:
 - Tragedy or disaster
 - Accident, incident, or mishap
- Prepare a press kit for the reporter with appropriate background information to include images and b-roll

Preparing your SME

Time constraints can often get in the way of being able to properly prepare and rehearse your SME. Even if the reporter has to wait a few minutes it is worth the time to ensure your SME is properly prepared.

General tips

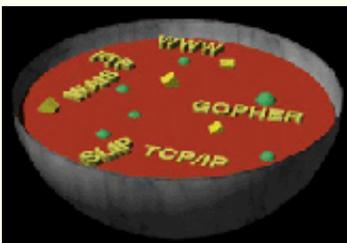
- Lead with a punch - answer the first question and immediately bridge into your primary command message



- Stay in your lane - do not stray from the subject and talk only about what you know



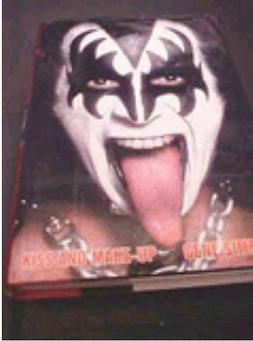
- You are always "on the record" - do not say it if you do not want to read about it the next day
- Avoid the use of acronyms and military jargon



Preparing your SME

General tips

- Keep your message simple - break it down as if you are talking to your mother or sibling. Use the kiss formula



- Always tell the truth
- It is okay to say you do not know the answer, but at least offer to try to find the answer
- Do not speculate
- Stay cool, confident and in control



- Accentuate the positive and do not repeat the negative
- Pause, think and then respond with confidence

Preparing your SME (continued)

General techniques

- Information + command message = Good response
- If appropriate, lead with condolences, but do so smoothly and with sincerity
- Hooking - bait the reporter to ask the question about the topic you want to talk about
- Bridging - verbal maneuvering to what you want to discuss
- Flagging - using body language or verbal intonation to make a point
- Bundling/packaging - tying your information or messages together for a response
- The "do over" - if you choke or misspeak ask to start again

Preparing your SME

Tricks of the trade

When preparing your SME it is a good idea to brief him/her about some of the tricks of the trade some reporters use. An important aspect of a successful interview is to be able to recognize these techniques and how to handle them in an appropriate manner. Some of these techniques include:

- Needling. Some reporters like to repeatedly gibe an interviewee in attempt to provoke or elicit some form of frustrated response. Teresa Heinz Kerry's now famous "Shove it" comment is an example of such a reaction. If you are confronted with such a situation, recognize it for what it is. Take the high ground, keep your cool and stay on message
- False facts. Either by design or accident, some reporters will have false information embedded in their question. If this happens to you correct the information immediately and move on with your response.
- Reinterpretation. Again, either by design or accident, a reporter will reinterpret your response. If this happens to you, listen carefully to ensure the reinterpretation is an accurate reflection of what you said. If it is, fine. If it isn't, correct it immediately
- Putting words in your mouth. This technique goes something like this, "Would you say the widget malfunctioned because of poor design?" If this isn't exactly what you want to convey, correct it immediately.

Preparing your SME

Tricks of the trade

- False conclusion. Reporters that use this technique will typically take your response and intentionally or unintentionally arrive at a conclusion that is simply not true. If you experience this situation, correct it immediately.
- Hypothetical questions. Responding to hypothetical questions could be dangerous. It is best to stick with the facts as you know them and not speculate on what might or might not happen in a hypothetical environment.
- Baiting. Reporters use this technique in an attempt to lure you into a line of questioning where you don't want to go. It could also be the "Do you still beat your wife?" type of question. It's important to recognize the signs of baiting early and make a conscious effort not to go down that road.

Print, Television Stand-up and Group Television Interviews

Print interviews

When working with a print journalist you can expect that interviews with you or your SME will be conducted in either a face-to-face setting or over the telephone. If the reporter is working a fast-breaking story, close to deadline and there isn't time to travel to the spokesperson, the interview will likely be conducted over the telephone. However, if the reporter isn't on deadline and has more time he/she will often ask for a face-to-face interview with you or your SME. Because print reporters often have more time to research and write their stories, you as the PAO, must be prepared to spend more time with the reporter and provide him/her with much more detailed information.

During the process of taking the query and discussing the potential of an interview with an SME, you also need to spend some time interviewing the reporter. Not only do you need to have a good idea of the basic story line and a clear understanding of the reporter's initial questions, you also need to get a feel for the angle or slant the reporter may be taking on the story. You will also want to find out what the reporter already knows about the story and whom he/she may have already spoken with.

Once you have a good understanding of what the reporter already knows and what additional information he/she is looking for, it's now time to plan for and participate in the interview. Before the reporter arrives, advise your staff to avoid any interruptions. When the reporter arrives place him/her at ease with a warm welcome. Even though this is a print interview, you or your SME need to project energy and confidence, and bridge to your command messages as often as possible.

Print, Television Stand-up and Group Television Interviews

On-camera Stand-up Interview

While the basic fact finding steps for an on-camera stand-up interview are similar to those of a print interview, there are some differences to keep in mind.

Selecting the appropriate location for the stand-up can help by providing visual impact to the story. If the story is about a new piece of equipment, try to get it in the shot. If the story is about a troop deployment, try to do the stand-up in the area where troops are preparing to deploy.

In your planning process make sure you have allowed enough time for the crew to survey the site and set up their equipment. While the crew is setting up use this time to interview the reporter to get a feel for the types of questions to be asked. This will give you or your SME an opportunity to begin formulating responses.

Print, Television Stand-up and Group Television Interviews

On-camera Stand-up Interview



Once the interview begins, respond to the reporter, not the camera. Remember to keep your answers short, 7 to 20 seconds and bridge to a command message as frequently as possible, to the point of being repetitive. This technique -- used during taped, not live, interviews -- increases the chances of your command messages making it through the editing process and being aired. Since each response should stand on its own, don't refer to a previous answer by saying "again" or "as I said before".

You or your SME should control the pace of the interview. By looking downward while listening to the question and gathering your thoughts for the response, you will control the pace of the interview. When you are ready to respond, look at the reporter, then begin your response.



Print, Television Stand-up and Group Television Interviews

Group Television Interview



Many of the same points from the stand-up interview apply to the group television interview, but the setting and the dynamics might be different. A group television interview could take place in a studio, on location during a media visit to a unit or command or at a news conference.

As the PAO, you should assist the director or on-air personality in orchestrating the interview. This could include reviewing the line of questioning with the interviewer and identifying who is best qualified to answer what questions.

Live Talk-back Interviews (Cont)

Setting and Technology

As mentioned before, one of the main reasons for TV stations to use this type of interview is the ease and lower expense...it gives them more “bang” for their buck. There are some things you’re in control of and things you need to be aware of.

Whether you are interviewed from your office, a local bureau of a cable channel or network or from the sands of Iraq, be aware that the minute you step in front of the camera or near a microphone, everything is on the record, even if the interview hasn’t started. It’s entirely possible your microphone might accidentally be opened or an engineer could inadvertently flip a switch beaming you out around the world...although this is very difficult to do. The rule of thumb is it’s all on the record until you see “the tail lights of the satellite truck driving away.”

IFB: “Interruptible feedback” This piece of equipment, otherwise known as the ear piece, is one of three pieces of equipment needed to do a live talk-back interview. The others are a lavalier or wireless microphone and a camera. The IFB is how you hear questions and comments going out over the air. This is also how you’ll hear the producer, as they get ready to come to you.

If, as the guest, you are asked if you’d like a monitor so you can see the host and other guests during the interview...we suggest turning it down. It’s useful if you’re looking at b-roll to explain something i.e. a football game etc...but for just an interview it’s a distraction, particularly if you start looking at the monitor and not at your audience through the camera lens.

Live Talk-back (Cont)

Setting and Technology

It is critical that almost 100 percent of one's eye contact be in the center of the lens. For many people the natural reaction is to look up or down as they listen to a question or other guest. **THAT IS NOT A LUXURY IN THE SATELLITE INTERVIEW.** The camera might be on you at any time....always look into the center of the lens.

Live Talk-back (Cont)

The Greeting and the Close

The most common mistake interviewees make is to believe they are not on camera until introduced. The result is that the audience has been looking at the guest for several seconds...ALREADY MAKING JUDGMENTS about their credibility and likability. REMEMBER: viewers come to some conclusions about you in less than 10 seconds.

The moment you hear the host speaking, regardless of what they're saying, assume you're on-camera. That means you need to have a smile on your face before the camera comes to you. Even if the subject matter involves causalities or is troubling, greet the audience affirmatively. If a smile is not appropriate, still nod and respond with, "Thank you for having me on your program," or "thank you for allowing me to talk with your viewers." The first impression should be that you want to be there.

When the interview ends, thank the host for the opportunity to have been there. Assume the interview is over when you get an "all clear" message in your ear or from the field producer/camera person.

Tips for Success

Interviews on MSNBC or CNN might run about four minutes. It's rare that a satellite interview within a local news broadcast will last more than two minutes. EVERY QUESTION COUNTS! Respond to each question and bridge to your command message often, using examples, anecdotes and stories to give your message life and credibility.

Build rapport with the Crew. In the old days a live shot involved a camera operator, a technician to handle lights and sound and a field producer. Today competitive pressures and improvements in technology mean that you may face only one person to handle the set up and operation of the camera AND running the truck (if it's a microwave truck). Ask whomever is running the shot on your end to give you a clear signal when you're off the air.

Provide b-roll and graphics...many times stations will show b-roll during your interview. Most of the time they have their own...but it's a nice gesture to offer yours. If you're speaking on something technical and you think your graphics would aid understanding...make sure you offer those as well.

Get comfortable with the IFB. Make certain your IFB is secure in your ear and that you can hear the producer, host or anchor. Let someone (on site tech/producer, etc.) know ASAP if you're having trouble hearing and they can adjust the volume.

Tips for Success (Cont)

Get comfortable with the IFB. Make certain it is secure in your ear and that you can hear the producer, host or anchor. Let someone (on site tech/producer, etc.) know ASAP if you're having trouble hearing and they can adjust the volume.

Listen closely! Usually the reporter or anchor will precede your interview with a VO (voice over), VOSOT (voice over sound on tape) or PKG. (package a.k.a. an on-camera stand up by a reporter). Ask to listen to your lead-in through the IFB so you know what came before you. Minor inaccuracies are usually not worth correcting on the air (your time is limited); however it is okay to offer a correction if needed after answering your first question. Listen closely to each question and comment and find ways to "bridge" to your command messages.

Look directly into the camera. It's your responsibility to build rapport with the audience through the lens of the camera. Put other distractions out of your mind and emote into the camera. Sit up straight, don't swivel or lean, avoid tilting your head and use gestures to engage the audience.

The camera is always on!!!! Expect that the camera is always recording both sound and visuals. You're always on, so maintain your composure and smile if appropriate. Avoid scratching and fiddling and be careful about pre-program chatter with techs.

Consider your backdrop. Be aware of the setting for your interview. While the field crew or producer make the final decision...feel free to suggest a backdrop or setting that supports your message or puts you in a positive environment. If you're at the scene of an emergency ...expect to be interviewed in front of the emergency equipment or the accident itself.

Live, Taped and Re-played Interviews

Just because the live shot is over doesn't mean it's disappeared into TV history. The interview is always recorded at the station. Now it can, and usually will, be used in other forms. For example, you may do a live talk-back for the noon show, and then you see a VOSOT at 5 p.m. or maybe a SOT is used in a PKG later...

It can be put into replay. Many cable channels do a "live" newscast and then it replays until they do another one.

Sometimes, if you can't be reached again, the interview can be cut up into VOSOTS or put in PKGS.

Live interviews, like almost everything else in TV land are always taped. Whether or not they are saved is another story!

Unit Summary

As a PAO you need to know the various stages of the interview process so you can properly prepare for, conduct, monitor, close out and evaluate the interview. If you follow the steps and suggestions contained in this lesson you will enhance your chances of facilitating a very successful interview. You will find that, over time, the steps you use will become second nature and will serve you well.