



Contra Costa County Office of Education

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Nine Important Tips for your First Interview

1. Develop a Message: Little is more important than knowing what you want to communicate during an interview. Quickly jot down the three most important phrases or sentences you want to communicate to the audience.

2. Repeat, Repeat, Repeat: You should articulate at least one of your messages in every answer. You shouldn't parrot them back verbatim, but should communicate the central *idea* of a message in each response.

3. Transition: There's no such thing as the "perfect" question. It's your job as a spokesperson to transition, or "bridge," from their question to your message. To help you do that, you can use a line such as, "The most important thing to remember is..." or, "Well, what we're seeing here is...."

4. Don't Make a New Friend: If you're 20 minutes into your interview and things are going well, you might think to yourself, "Wow. This isn't hard at all!" The moment you get comfortable and start thinking the reporter is your friend, you're going to venture away from your message and make a mistake. The journalist may legitimately be friendly – but she's not your friend.

5. Speak Everyday English: You may think you sound more credible if you speak with big, jargon-filled words. You won't – those words just erect a barrier between you and the audience. When speaking with general audiences, use words a bright 12-year-old would understand. You're aiming for the language of *USA Today*, not the *Wall Street Journal*.

6. Don't Bury Your Lead: When answering a question, don't lead up to your conclusion. Give the most interesting part of your answer, or your "lead," first. If you have additional time, you can go back and provide more context – but if you don't start with your lead, the reporter may cut you off before you get a chance to state it at all.

7. Be Your Most Engaging Self: This sounds like clichéd advice, but it's not. Most new spokespersons think they have to bury their most engaging traits in order to come across looking like an "official" or "credible" spokesperson. They usually just look boring instead. Be your passionate self. Gesture. Convey warmth and smile when appropriate.

8. Speak 10 Percent Louder Than Usual: If you go on television and speak at your usual volume, you will probably sound monotone (this doesn't apply to professional wrestlers or other unusually loud people). For most of us, TV has a "muting" effect, meaning you have to speak a bit louder just to sound like you usually do. Plus, the boost of volume usually helps animate your body language.

9. Watch Your Tone: If you feel defensive, you will *look* defensive. Instead of greeting tough questions with panic, welcome them as opportunities to correct the record. Instead of thinking, "Oh, no! Here comes a tough question!" think, "I'm delighted you're giving me this opportunity to correct that misconception." Even if you don't have a perfect answer, the audience will be more inclined to believe a response from a spokesperson who doesn't come across as defensive.