

Media Interview Guidelines

Before an Interview:

- ⇒ If a reporter calls for an interview, it is acceptable to ask what the subject is and request a few sample questions.
- ⇒ Ask for the name of the reporter and the media organization they're affiliated with. If the name sounds unfamiliar, you may contact University Communications for vetting.
- ⇒ Ask about the deadline. Feel free to decline an interview request or to schedule the interview for a later time that better suits your schedule.
- ⇒ Prepare a few talking points on your area of expertise. Fill it with facts, figures and anecdotes.
- ⇒ Avoid speaking in jargon, but do explain technical terms if you must use them.
- ⇒ It is helpful if your remarks are short and quotable. This minimizes room for misquoting.
- ⇒ Be prepared to comment on general industry trends, but stick to your main key messages and avoid getting drawn into tangents.
- ⇒ Steer answers back to your points by saying "what's important to remember is..." or "what I can tell you is..." or "...I think what you are really asking is..."
- ⇒ If you are addressing a controversial subject, anticipate hard questions and prepare your responses ahead of time.

During an Interview:

- ⇒ Reporters are required to let you know if they are recording a phone call. If you are unsure, it is acceptable to ask.
- ⇒ When interviewed on TV, speak to the interviewer and not the camera, avoid distracting behavior such as pen tapping. Wear solid colors rather than patterns. Make sure that you appear professional as you are representing JMU.
- ⇒ It is acceptable to have notes in front of you.
- ⇒ It is acceptable to not answer a question, but it is best to say why you are not. Answering that you don't know is perfectly acceptable.
- ⇒ Keep your answers concise and use layman's terms, responses around 10-30 seconds are best.
- ⇒ If you are asked run-on questions, you may choose to answer all of the questions individually or pick the part that you want to answer.
- ⇒ If the issue is complex, try to include metaphors to help the general audience understand. Analogies are strong and colorful.
- ⇒ Use single, clear sentences to make your point. Do not feel compelled to continue talking after you have made your point. Reporters often leave a space of silence to draw unintended remarks out of interviewees trying to "fill the space." Don't get sucked into the silence. Just smile.
- ⇒ Personal experiences are credible and important. You are welcome to share your story.
- ⇒ If a reporter bases a question on information you believe is incorrect, do not hesitate to set the record straight.
- ⇒ Avoid answering hypotheticals.
- ⇒ Do not be afraid to say you need to verify facts and call back. But make sure you do this in a timely manner.
- ⇒ Do not feel compelled to say more than you need to.

After an Interview:

- ⇒ Please notify your media relations liaison when you have been interviewed.
- ⇒ Tell the reporter you wish to be identified and to mention your affiliation in the story.
- ⇒ You may ask what the story angle is.
- ⇒ If you feel like you've misspoken or given incorrect information, let the reporter know. It also be helpful to let your media relations liaison know.

Keep in mind

- ❖ Reporters' schedules are determined by the "breaking news" of the day. Your story may be cancelled or rescheduled due to priority.
- ❖ If there has been an error in the story or you are unhappy with it, contact your media relations liaison.
- ❖ University Communications cannot promise media coverage, we can only do our best to make opportunities available.
- ❖ Give positive feedback to reporters if you enjoyed a story. This will help build a good relationship and encourage the reporter to contact you again. Please notify your media relations liaison if they do.
- ❖ If a reporter asks you for comments on an institutional issue please redirect the reporter to your media relations liaison.
- ❖ Reporters are not always responsible for writing headlines and photo captions. If there are errors, they may have been made by someone else. Please notify the reporter and/or your media relations liaison if you spot a mistake.