

Media workshop sheet

Getting media attention is not an end in itself, but it can be a way to help achieve another objective. *Media* is the means to communicate something to someone. Always take the time to work out **what** you're trying to say, and **who** you're saying it to.

The eight aspects of news-iness

Impact ... A big event/announcement that will affect or involves many people.

Conflict ... Tension between groups/ideas. Community debate, a struggle against the elements, machines v people, the drama of sneaking in, police, passion, tears and physical danger.

Timeliness... The importance of when the information is disseminated. Is something about to happen that will change things? A pending decision? A court case? A new Bill or regulation? A major meeting?

Proximity... Has the thing happened within or is it relevant to a media organisation's circulation area?

Prominence... A person/event/issue that is widely recognisable on a local, state or national basis.

Currency... controversy, trends, a response to something that has recently happened. Related to, but not quite the same as timeliness.

Human Interest... An angle or close-up story that people will connect to: personal stories, animal stories, backgrounds.

The unusual... Can relate to an incident, point of view, lifestyle etc – common denominator is that the piece is out of the ordinary and often surprisingly so.

They won't keep reporting the same story over and over – there needs to be progression, conflict, new angles and different stories.

Tips for writing media releases

- Summarise everything in the first two lines, include the drama, and **who, what and why**.
- Keep to one idea, and one page. Don't jam too many angles or info in to one release.
- Keep sentences and paragraphs short, use evocative words and avoid jargon ("direct action" "stacker reclamer" "PEL")
- If you have more detailed information you want to give, stick it on the next page as "Background"
- Different stories suit different media. How detailed is your story? Does it need the longer explanation newspapers can give? Is it happening urgently and locally, where radio is useful? Are there scenes and activities that only television can convey?
- Should you broadcast your release or target particular journalists first? If its complex, it's often more successful to talk it through with one journalist as an exclusive, rather than broadcasting. Is there someone who has written on the issue in the past, has the background knowledge and is likely to write a story if you give them one?

Write down the answers to these questions first

What is happening? Why does it matter? Why is it newsworthy? Who is your audience?

What motivates your audience? What do you want the reader/viewer to *do* after hearing the story?

What words or phrases that frame the issue in ways you want to avoid? What words or phrases frame the issue in ways that help?

The Golden Rules of media and protest

- **Never explain how you did it** (talk about *why* you did it, and the effect you're having)
- **Never forget that they are watching you:** all of you are on stage, and everything you do will be taken to represent the issue more broadly. Be in character.
- **Keep the smoking, eating, swearing and joking for later, after the cameras are gone.** Do not have arguments with cops and workers while cameras are around.
- **If you can't think of what to say, read your media release** (no good for on camera!).
- **Never look down the camera while doing an interview.** It is okay to say "sorry, can I start that again?" (unless you are on live!)
- **Stay focused:** each sentence has to communicate your message. They will cut and edit your interview, and if you babbled about something else, they might use that and you will have missed your chance. If they ask you something you don't want talk about, practice how to acknowledge the question and use a bridge to something you want to say.
- **Elect a spokesperson who knows what they're talking about.** BUT if you're stumped, it is better to say "sorry, I don't know the answer to that question," than to make shit up.
- **Journalists are not your friends** – they just want to tell a story. Don't give them information you don't want everyone to know. Don't let your guard down.

Interview techniques

- Speak slowly and clearly in short sentences. They will look through the footage for "grabs" so take breath breaks after pithy clauses and sentences (ie. If you just keep saying "and... and... and..." they may find it hard to edit, and give up on the story.)
- Don't be afraid to ask to say something again.
- Be legal, decent, honest and truthful.
- Have media release in front of you in case you get stuck.
- Don't be afraid to take your time, ask them what they mean if you're confused or tell them you'll get back to them once you've thought about it.
- Avoid jargon and abbreviations
- Know the facts and get a key message/messages that you will repeat to get the message across.
- Practice how to acknowledge and bridge if you get a curly question. This can include using a phrase or word from the question, or saying "I'm glad you asked me that..."
- If you are asked something you really don't want to answer, try to answer in a non-sentence or in abstract generalities, so it's harder for them to use it as a grab.

Acknowledge and bridge – some examples

"Aren't you creating a dangerous situation for innocent workers?"

*"The **dangerous situation here** has been created by Whitehaven Coal, who have defied community wishes..."*

Whitehaven say there's been no impact on their work, what have you achieved anyway?

*"I'm glad you asked me that, **our action today** has put the Environment Minister on notice..."*