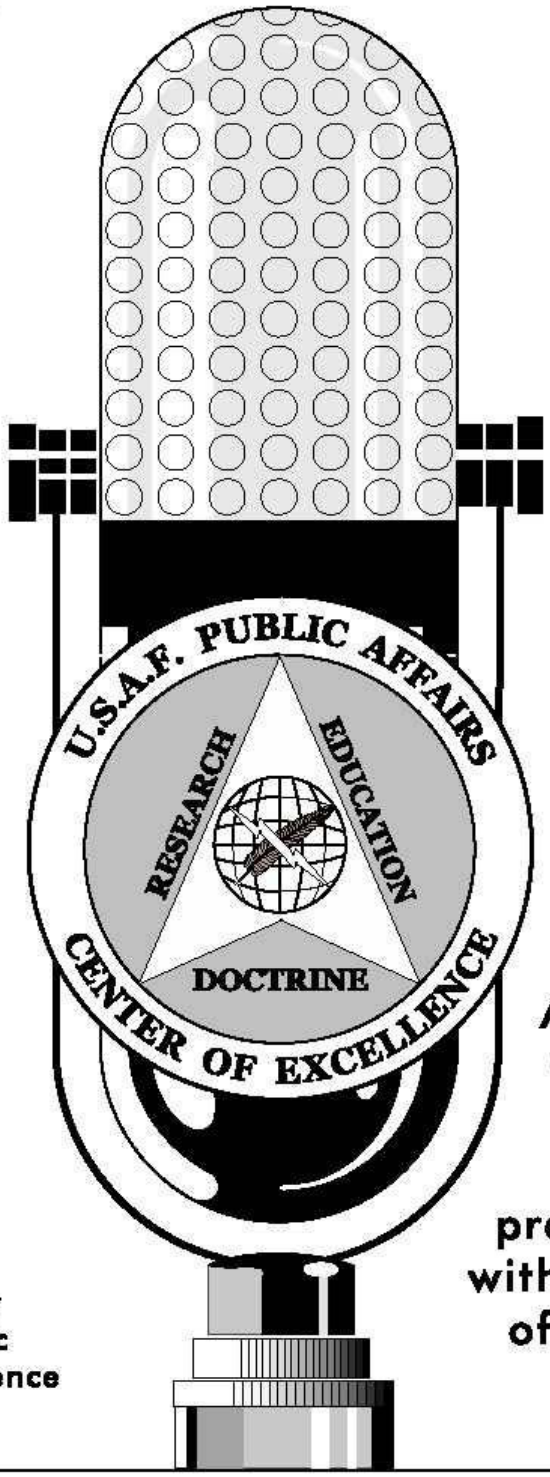
College of Aerospace Doctrine, Research and Education, Air University

MEETING THE MEDIA



A practical guide to assist military personnel and DOD civilians in preparing to speak with representatives of the news media

Compiled and edited by
the U.S. Air Force Public
Affairs Center of Excellence

2002 edition

PREFACE

This handbook was prepared by the United States Air Force Public Affairs Center of Excellence at Maxwell AFB, Ala.

While it is designed as an instruction aid for students in Air University schools, it contains information applicable to any and all Air Force personnel who may find themselves needing to engage the news media. As closely as possible, this handbook conforms to military public affairs policies published by the Department of Defense and Department of the Air Force.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface i
Forward 1
Who Are Those Guys? 2
The Nature of News 2
The Written Word 4
The Spoken Word 5
Understanding the Media 7
The Role of Conflict 7
Taking the Positive Approach 8
How to Help Channel Conflict 8
The Proverbial Bottom Line 9
Making Contact With The Media 10
Print journalism 10
Television 11
Radio 12
Combined Media..... 12
Public Affairs Staff Liaison with Reporters . 13
Preparing For The Interview 14
Responding To Questions 17
Watch Out For Sneaky Tactics 20
Lights, Camera, Action..... 22
Pre-taping Reconnaissance 22
Speak into the Mike 23
Ensuring a Professional Appearance 23
When the Camera is Rolling 25
Answering Questions on Television 26
Conducting A News Conference..... 28
After The Interview 31
Summary 32
Appendixes
Hints From A PR Pro 33
The Reporter's Perspective 36
Guidelines For Releasing Information 37
Develop Your Messages 39
12 Tips for Commanders 40
Aircraft Crash Quick Reference For CCs ... 41

FOREWARD

The American military's need for informed public support has never been greater. With the end of the Cold War and in the wake of Operations DESERT SHIELD and DESERT STORM in 1990-91, the challenges the U.S. military faces have continued to mount. This is evidenced by our continued presence in Southwest Asia, on the Korean Peninsula, in the Balkans, and now a war on global terrorism.

Gen. James L. Jones, Commandant of the U.S. Marine Corps, recently noted that the "average citizen, even the average congressman, neither knows nor cares about national security . . . " and that "congressmen and senators no longer vie for seats on the House or Senate Armed Services Committees." Statistics appear to underscore what some perceive as a growing divide between the military and the people it serves: fewer than one in 10 new recruits even knows a military veteran, and only four out of 100 Americans personally know someone in uniform.

Chief of Staff Gen. Michael E. Ryan and former Secretary of the Air Force F. Whitten Peters acknowledged these realities when they wrote in the USAF Strategic Communications Plan for 2000: "To meet these challenges, we must take every opportunity to communicate who we are, what we do, and our value to the nation to audiences across the Air Force and around the world. We must ensure our people take the initiative to discuss Air Force issues, activities, and priorities, and we must ensure their messages are clear, consistent, and compelling."

Consequently, it is absolutely essential that you as an officer, noncommissioned officer, enlisted member, or civilian employee develop the skills to become an effective spokesperson for the Air Force. You have a personal stake and responsibility to understand the need for a positive, professional working relationship between the military and the news media. For it's the members of the Fourth Estate who provide us with the fastest, most efficient, most reliable means to communicate with both our internal and external audiences.

To play in today's high-stakes "media game," however, you must first understand the rules. *Meeting the Media* was written so that you might better understand how you should prepare for and conduct yourself in a news media interview. It is our fervent intent that with the support of your Public Affairs Office and the guidance provided in this booklet, you can become a polished, confident, well-informed Air Force spokesperson.

DAVID L. SIMS, Colonel, USAF
Director, USAF Public Affairs Center of Excellence

WHO ARE THOSE GUYS?

If you were to ask the average military member to describe a journalist, you'd hear adjectives like "annoying" and "insensitive." The stereotype of a reporter is that he or she is always seeking, and sometimes creating, controversy. Everyone in the media is labeled as having a liberal political and social predisposition. Reporters are viewed as disorderly, informal, intrusive, and not very respectful. They are assumed to oppose explicit authority, to value individuality, and to be unwilling to accept group goals. In short, **reporters seem to be everything members of the armed forces are not.**

Reporters serve as the fourth estate of the government, and they take this duty as seriously as military people feel about their service.

Of course, journalists don't view themselves as having the same attributes that others use to characterize them. They are more likely to give the following self-assessment. Reporters consider themselves watchdogs of society and government, keeping a wary eye on institutions of power. In their highly competitive business, their **only desire is to provide the public what Americans have a right to know.** Journalists are skeptical of government claims until shown otherwise, (sound like the IG?) and they feel they are often the only check on government excesses. Finally, reporters claim they put balance, fairness, and objectivity above any personal predisposition.

Whereas the role of the military is to defend the nation from **external threats**, journalists view their responsibility to be guarding the U.S. from **internal threats** such as fraud, waste, inefficiency and abuse of power in government. The fact that the media's job is to expose what's happening in government and that the military often must operate in secret produce an adversarial relationship even before stereotypical personalities are thrown into the equation. The challenge for Air Force leaders is to **ensure this adversarial relationship is professional rather than hostile.**

The Nature of News:

Having considered the role and characteristics of journalists, let's turn our attention to what makes a piece of information newsworthy. If you were to consult a journalism textbook, you'd run across definitions of news like:

"A hitherto unpublished account of an event."

"The first information about any event that interests a large number of people."

"Anything timely that is both interesting and significant to readers or viewers."

Regardless of which definition you choose, a variety of criteria can be used to determine whether an item of information is newsworthy. One can point to10 criteria that may be used to judge events of the day. A story is newsworthy to the extent to which it meets one or more of these criteria.

Immediacy

When an event occurs is one of the most significant factors in determining whether or not it's newsworthy. If a story is timely, it is more likely to be covered than one which is older or less current. Immediacy seems to connote urgency, hence the preference for newer stories.

Proximity

The nearer an event is to your geographical location, the more likely it is to be covered by media in our area. If this criterion is used too exclusively without consideration for other important reasons for news selection, the scope of a news outlet's coverage may be narrow and severely limited.

It's not always about the who, what, where, when, why and how. There are elements of news that makes an event, decision or person more newsworthy.

Prominence

The more prominent a person, the more likely the media are to cover what he or she does. Prominence, though, is not always an accurate view of importance. Viewers and readers frequently learn of insignificant events in the lives of famous people that, had they happened to someone else, would not be considered newsworthy.

Consequence

The likely outcome of a situation or a decision is an important element in deciding whether to cover it. Often speculation on the probable course of events is the entire substance of a news story. If the outcome is uncertain, it's likely that the media will present an "informed analysis" of what may happen. Occasionally, media speculation may influence the outcome as a sort of "self-fulfilling prophecy."

Conflict

A story is certain to make the front page or the six o'clock news if it concerns conflict: political, military, financial, ideological, athletic, racial, social. While media rarely create conflict, their reporting of it can intensify a touchy situation that already exists. Occasionally, news coverage can assist in resolving conflicts.

Emotion

Journalists always are on the lookout for stories that tug at the heartstrings. If a reporter digs persistently enough, he or she will uncover emotions that are sufficiently contagious to involve readers or viewers. Emotions play particularly well on television and are a bit less important in print.

Oddity

If things are as they've always been, that's not news. If something is different, amiss, or peculiar, that's news. If it's unusual, out of the ordinary, or strange, a story has a much better chance of being covered.

Sex

Because it's such a basic part of the human condition, sex is difficult to ignore. If a reporter discovers sex appeal or a lust angle in a story, its place in a newscast or newspaper will accelerate overnight.

Suspense

Just as in the case of consequence, any time an outcome is uncertain, stories will center on the suspense involved. This type of coverage allows editors to recap the relevant details of events over time, heightens interest in following the story in tomorrow's newspaper or newscast, and offers journalists the opportunity to provide perspective.

Progress

News consumers are interested in following changes in a situation over time. Depending on the viewpoint of the reader or viewer, what is progress to one person may be regression for another.

In summary, newsworthiness is determined by considering these 10 criteria. The greater the number of these criteria in a given situation, the more likely it is to be covered by the media. Not all stories are of equal interest to all members of the public. Finally, news judgments are exercised individually by the gatekeepers who run news organizations. What is news to one may not be news to another. The only way to ensure you don't miss something newsworthy is to seek information from a variety of sources and compare the coverage in each.

The Written Word:

Newspapers were the original vehicle for transmitting news to the public, but today surveys continue to show a majority of Americans seek information through more timely broadcast sources. Newspaper circulation has declined during the past decade. Newspapers, though, treat issues with much more perspective than do the electronic media.

In most large cities, daily newspapers with one or more morning or evening editions are printed. However, the number of afternoon papers in the U.S. continues to decline largely because of increased competition from other media outlets and the changing reading habits of busy Americans. Generally, newspapers in smaller markets are published weekly.

Deadlines drive the newsgathering business. A morning paper is generally "put to bed" by 11 p.m. the previous night. Updated editions follow throughout the morning. Afternoon papers have first-edition deadlines by midmorning. Weekly papers have no less flexible deadlines, generally 18 to 24 hours before the issue date.

'Hold the presses'

Print media, most especially newspapers, are competing against television and Internet news sources that are more accessible and don't require much time to digest the information.

Technology is changing the newspaper business. Color printing, once too costly, has become routine. With the advances in telefax machines and satellite communications, national daily papers, like Gannett's USA TODAY, have sprouted. High-tech capabilities now play a big part in the way news is gathered and disseminated. Most reporters prepare their stories on computers, which link newsrooms directly to the presses for faster typesetting. Other forms of the printed word, such as magazines and journals, enjoy many of the same technological advances. Because magazines have longer periods between issues and more focused subject matter, writers for these publications can explore an issue in more depth than can journalists working for newspapers or the electronic media.

The pace of introducing new forms of transmitting the written word continues to accelerate. Computer and telefax services are becoming more popular sources of information. Annette Hamilton, Executive Producer for *ZDNet*, wrote on July 21, 1999 that "new evidence suggests the Net has emerged as the arch-nemesis of old media, as it continues to undermine television viewing and cut into use of other media." Wired homes watch an average of 13 percent less TV — roughly an hour a day – than their non-wired counterparts, according to a recent study by Nielsen Media Research (commissioned by *America Online*).

More than half of Internet users looking for news online turn to newspaper sites, according to a survey conducted for the Newspaper Association of America. A recent Editor & Publisher survey found 33 percent of Web news consumers had reduced their reading of print newspapers since going online. Another Editor & Publisher study of 53,000 newspaper Web site users reveals:

- 35 percent are spending less time watching videos
- 30 percent are making less use of the phone
- 29 percent are watching less broadcast or cable television
- 25 percent are listening less to radio

With the increasing rate of technological change, it's too soon to measure the long-range impact of these sources, but it's safe to say we haven't seen the last of advanced methods of providing news to the public.

The Spoken Word:

Unlike a few years ago, when television news was limited to ABC, CBS, NBC, and the networks' local affiliated stations, today's spoken information sources also include CNN, MSNBC and a host of other cable outlets, all vying for the viewer's attention. Although regulatory differences between broadcast and cable carriers exist, the newsgathering process is essentially the same. However, the thing to keep in mind here is that rather than filling a half-hour nightly news cast, several broadcast outlets have 24 hours of time to fill, meaning that stories that once would not have been considered significant enough for national or international coverage are now sought after to fill those 24-hour news holes.

Gallup Poll

In a poll taken in November 2000 by the Gallup Organization, more than 1,000 people were asked to rate honesty and ethics in professions. The question was "Please tell me how you would rate the honesty and ethical standards of people in these different fields -- very high, high, average, low or very low."
Of the 32 professions rated, television reporters were rated 22nd with 21 percent of the respondents giving a 'very high' or 'high' rating. Newspaper reporters were 29th with 16 percent of those polled giving a 'very high' or 'high' rating.

The military profession was not part of this poll.

* source www.gallup.com

Television broadcast deadlines are usually four to five hours before airtime. Standard procedure is to shoot raw video on location and to take it back to the station for final editing. When time is of the essence, microwave trucks are used to provide live coverage of events.

Most television networks have crews in large cities, and these people cover significant happenings in their regions. Because they usually cover regions rather than subjects, reporters may know little or nothing about a topic when they arrive to cover a story. In addition, networks often rely on their local affiliates for raw video or edited stories. Because reporters and cameramen get paid for what they provide to a network, not to mention the possible benefits of network exposure to individuals when jobs at the network open up, local stations covering what are essentially local stories, may try to tie the local events to national or international events in hopes that the network will take the feed.

The age of high-tech communications has ushered in a useful method of conducting television interviews. News anchors in one city can now question experts in other locations via satellite. These remote interviews are evidenced on almost every network's evening news program. Television revenue comes from commercials, up to 15 minutes every hour. Rates are usually charged for 15, 30, and 60-second messages and are based on the popularity of the programs during which the ads appear. The local evening news is traditionally the most watched and therefore, most profitable locally originated programming. The sale of commercial time on local news shows accounts for more than half the total revenue for a network affiliate TV station in a major market. The difference in one audience rating point in a local news program can mean hundreds of thousands of dollars in revenue to a station.

That's why there's the deafening level of hype we often see on the evening news. That's why you are besieged with nonsense such as "breaking news" for a grass fire, "exclusive weather" and "a story you'll see only on Channel X." Why you'll see the same footage of a "dramatic police chase" for two days of two cars doing 40 mph on an empty street. Television is a visual business. And it's all about pictures.

The visual nature of television is one of the main reasons Americans choose it over newspapers, magazines, and radio as their source of news. Moving, color images have it hands down over static photos, written words, or nonvisual audio.

Radio news is noted primarily for its timeliness. Whether in vans equipped for remote broadcast, or just relying on a cellular telephone, radio reporters can go on the air almost immediately as a story breaks. Meanwhile, television news must wait until a camera crew arrives on the scene, and newspapers can't provide information any sooner than the next scheduled edition. However, what radio gains in timeliness, it loses in depth of coverage. It generally features the shallowest reporting of the issues.

Like magazines and unlike network television, radio stations have found ways to segment their markets, seeking specific audiences in varied formats like talk radio, Top 40, Country and Western and adult contemporary. This permits advertisers to target potential customers based on their need or desire for the company's product or service.

Understanding the Media:

"Why is it that reporters always pick the worst possible times to show up?" a commander once asked. It's true that when the media appear on your doorstep, you may not always feel like being interviewed. You may be out in the community at a meeting to discuss flying safety, to answer accusations on environmental problems, or to state your case on proposed defense cutbacks. You may be in your own office with a major crisis brewing on the base. The last words you want to hear are, "Sir, there are some reporters here who'd like to talk with you for a couple of minutes."

Because your position demands it, you reluctantly agree to chat with the journalists. In many cases, they're working against strict deadlines. They hastily scribble several pages of notes, stuff their notebooks into their pockets, take the camera off its tripod, and hurry out the door to finish their stories, disappearing almost as quickly as they arrived.

As you watch the six o'clock news that evening, and again when you peruse the newspaper the following morning, you're frustrated to see reports that bear little resemblance to what you remember having been discussed. The facts appear to be correct; at least the stories don't contain any falsehoods. But what the reporters chose to emphasize and what they omitted seem to have framed the issue in a context entirely different from what you saw, heard, or said.

The Role of Conflict:

Journalists make conscious effort to express the conflict involved in a situation they're covering. They know **conflict sells newspapers and keeps viewers tuned in.** The need to emphasize the dramatic, coupled with the constraint of the brief time or limited space available in which to tell the story, creates a challenge for the reporter. In the first sentence or two, the story must tell the who, what, where, when, and how. Even this will be boiled down to the most "newsworthy" facts in order to hook the reader, listener, or viewer into the rest of the story

A journalist will select the facts that emphasize or dramatize the conflict he or she feels is inherent to the situation.

It is easier to find an element of conflict in bad news than it is in good news, so reporters often choose to cover the negative side of an issue or event. This is not necessarily biased reporting. It is simply a practicality, given the pressure of deadlines and the need to attract the audience's attention. A journalist will select the facts that emphasize or dramatize the conflict he or she feels is inherent in the situation. Couple this with a growing trend for reporters to perceive themselves as **advocates for the "little guy,"** and you can see how trying to get fair coverage can become a very difficult proposition.

Newspaper and magazine reporters, in looking for data that support their

concept of conflict, seek controversial documents and officials who can be urged into making meaty, quotable statements. Radio reporters try for on-the-scene quotes that bring immediacy to their coverage. This is why they sometimes resort to aggressive techniques, asking loaded or leading questions as they push a microphone into a newsmaker's face. Television reporters look for catchy, **10 to 15-second statements (*changed from former 15 – 30 second statements*)** that can be accompanied by visual drama: fires, accidents, a crowded meeting room.

Taking the Positive Approach:

Given this environment, what can an organization do to be prepared to work with the media? First, face the facts. The opportunities for media coverage are expanding, but so is the competition for time and space. More groups are seeking airtime and print stories, and an increasing number of news outlets are scrambling for a share of the action.

So that an organization is not caught off guard when the media come calling, it must prepare its senior officials to deal with reporters. In this era, anyone can be tapped to be the company spokesman with very little warning, and the person selected should not be thrust into the spotlight unprepared. In the Air Force, not only should ***every commander, every program manager, every senior officer know and be able to apply the techniques required to deal effectively with the media,*** but all Air Force personnel, officer, enlisted, and civilian, should be prepared to talk to the press about their individual pieces of the Air Force story. They must be aware of reporters' styles and techniques, and they must understand how to react in situations in which they're confronted by the media.

As many organizations have discovered, the days of ducking the press have vanished. Rarely will you be able to avoid the roving media spotlight by hunkering down into your foxhole. In trying to avoid discussion about a negative matter, organizations have learned the hard way that their uncooperative attitude has only forced the journalist to seek his or her facts elsewhere, often from a person or a group with an axe to grind. One thing is certain: **If you don't do your own talking, some opposition group will *fill that time, and the Air Force position will go untold.***

"It (the military) must seize such opportunities to put across its own view of the situation, and 'shape the battlefield. For the military, a few 'clever images' will never compensate for a coherent explanation in summarizing the nuances of a particular issue or situation."

-- Ajay K. Rai "Military-Media Interface: Changing Paradigms New Challenges"

How to Help Channel Conflict:

Because the media are here to stay, the Air Force will be best served as its people develop the skills to channel a reporter's quest for conflict into more positive directions. The first step in this process is getting to know the reporters who regularly cover your organization. Commanders should make an effort to meet assignment editors, news directors, or station managers, before bad news strikes! You'll find media people are human, with good days and bad days, preferences and prejudices, likes and dislikes. You'll also discover that the vast majority of reporters try to be somewhat analytical and unbiased in approaching a story.

As you become more familiar with reporters, you'll be able to ***encourage their sense of professionalism and their pride in being fair and accurate.***

Approach them as though you expect their editorial behavior to reflect these qualities. Let them know you expect not favoritism, but fair treatment. Then make yourself available so reporters can get your side of the story -- even if it's a negative story -- in time for their deadlines.

Try to ***emphathize with a reporter's needs and priorities***. Discuss with journalist their deadlines, how stories are assigned, and how you can take the initiative to get a story to them. Ask how stories are edited. Chat about who writes the sensational headlines that catch the reader's eye while frequently blowing the story out of proportion. (Usually, it's not the reporter who writes those headlines.) Ask some personal questions: how the reporter feels his or her station or paper covers the news, his or her accomplishments and career goals. As you talk with reporters, editors and station managers when a story is not at stake, you'll pave the way for better understanding and communication when the pressure is on both of you.

Just as you have to deal with unpleasant challenges in your operations, reporters also have to deal with difficult situations. Recognizing this may help you make your relationships with journalists a bit less hostile. If you are ***courteous and cooperative rather than antagonistic and defensive***, the reporter will be more likely to hear and to understand your viewpoints. He or she will also be more likely to give you the opportunity to put a story in perspective when others are making charges against your organization. And should an encounter between you and a reporter become contentious, you must remain the "adult" in the exchange. The public will expect you to uphold the professional standards of the Air Force.

Besides, you can't win against the guy who buys ink by the barrel. As former President Richard M. Nixon once remarked, "... the media always has the last word."

The Proverbial Bottom Line:

Your establishing positive relationships with the media will not result in journalists backing down when they believe they're on the trail of a scoop. But answering reporters' tough questions can be a lot more palatable if you're acquainted and are committed to treating each other fairly.

Being recognized as a spokesman for your organization may put you in the limelight at times when you'd prefer anonymity. It means that your every remark before an audience is fair game for news coverage. It also means that reporters will seek you out for your views, even on issues that are only remotely related to your operations. ***The more you cooperate, the more likely your organization's side of the story will be sought*** whenever a conflict is reported. Your constructive input could help turn the tide. So meet with reporters. Return their calls. Treat journalists from all media outlets equally when you initiate a story. Tell the truth. Don't talk off the record. Never hide behind technical jargon or excuses. Neither give nor expect favoritism. Instead, strive for ***mutual understanding and respect.*** Your success in following these guidelines will produce a much better chance that your side of the story will be told fairly and accurately.

"Public trust and support for the Air Force is undermined and may be lost, when any Air Force spokesperson attempts to deceive or lie to the U.S. public directly or through the media."

-- AFDD 2-5.4 Public Affairs Doctrine

MAKING CONTACT WITH MEDIA

Almost anyone in the Air Force — military or civilian, officer or enlisted — could someday participate in a media interview. "Not me! I'll never talk with a reporter," you quickly and confidently respond. Don't be so sure. When you least expect it, your organization, maybe even your job, may be thrust into the spotlight and your commander may tap you to be interviewed by the press. Or it could be that you will decide that it's in the best interest of your unit and the Air Force to take the initiative to seek out media coverage for an event or issue you're involved with. Often when a confrontational type of issue arises, the first side to interact with the media usually frames the story. Moreover, rumors tend to proliferate when an organization doesn't promptly provide a high-level accessible and knowledgeable spokesperson who is close to the situation. Whether you're leading the charge or reacting to an incoming request, it's helpful to understand the types of contact with the media that Air Force people normally have.

Print Journalism:

Writers for newspapers and magazines normally seek your views in one of several types of get-togethers. In addition, you may want to seize the initiative by going directly to the publication.

One-on-One Interviews

The most common method of researching a story idea is setting up a one-on-one interview. Usually the reporter will come to wherever is most convenient for the person to be interviewed, so you have some control over the location. Pick some-

Military leaders interacting with real reporters or people acting as reporters adds realism and valuable practice to exercises.

place where you're comfortable. The interview will consist of a series of questions and your responses and can last anywhere between 15 minutes and an hour, depending on the complexity of the issue and your role in the situation. The story on the interview usually will appear within a few days of the meeting between reporter and subject.

Editorial Boards

These sessions normally will be reserved for officials in policy-making positions. The Air Force representative will travel to a publication's headquarters and sit down with those who write the editorials for the newspaper or magazine. An average editorial board normally will be made up of a half dozen people. In these discussions, the topics are much broader than during an interview. The meeting is designed to provide editorial writers with the "big-picture" view of some high-level issues. Unless you ask the publication to include a reporter along with the editorial writers, don't expect to see anything in print following your session. When the newspaper or magazine gets around to publishing an editorial on the topic you discussed, you'll see whether or not your chat had any influence on the writers.

Letters to Editors

Occasionally, a reporter will miss the mark completely in a news story. Or every once in a while, a publication will take a stand different from the Air Force position. Although the newspaper or magazine may not retract its stance on an issue, it may be willing to print a letter from someone who holds a contrary view. Air Force leaders should keep an eye on how the media is covering us.

In cases in which we detect inaccuracy or unfairness, senior leaders should quickly write to the editor of the offending publication to set the record straight.

Opinion/Editorial Pieces

Sometimes a short letter to an editor to correct a published report or to take exception with an editorial position will not be enough to promote public understanding of an issue. This is often the case on weighty matters that have been debated over a relatively lengthy period of time. When a longer, more detailed summary of the Air Force position is appropriate, the best choice is a piece for the opinion/editorial page.

Television:

Studio Interviews

These are typically the least threatening interviews. You will be asked to travel to the television studio and sit down with the host or hostess for a discussion on a particular issue. The format is generally informal and upbeat.

Remote Interviews

When a reporter can't be in the same place as the interview subject, a remote

interview is scheduled. As television stations and networks face cuts in their budgets and subject experts are spread across the country, this type of interview is becoming more common. The geographical separation may be as small as a few blocks (for instance, an anchorman interviewing a dignitary who has just finished a speech in town) or as great as the distance between continents (for example, a newswoman in New York talking with a political leader in Paris).

Ambush Interview

Reporters are always on the lookout for a story, and when they can't schedule an interview with a newsmaker, they sometimes ambush them. A reporter will wait in a parking lot, outside a restroom, or near the door of a meeting room and catch an unsuspecting interview subject off guard. The atmosphere during these interviews can be tense, but there are ways to overcome the surprise and to make the situation come out to your advantage.

Stand-up Interviews

When disaster strikes, the media are never far behind. In an emergency, you may discover you not only have to resolve a sticky situation, but you have to answer the questions of a group of inquisitive reporters. In the midst of clean-up operations after an aircraft crash, a toxic waste spill, or similar disaster, the media will ask a spokesman to provide the details of the incident to the viewing audience.

Edited Interviews

Some issues, usually controversial ones, lend themselves to interviews with several people. A reporter, seeking balance in his or her story, will visit each person with something to say on the issue and record their comments. The journalist will then return to the studio, pluck about 10 to 20 seconds from each interview (often even less in a network interviews), and edit these comments together with his or her own conclusions for broadcast on the evening news.

Hostile Interviews

Although each of the above formats maybe filled with pressure, none is designed to be adversarial. On occasion, reporters may use any of these styles to conduct a hostile interview. In these situations, the journalist's intent is to put you on the spot by taking the position contrary to your point of view. In addition, he or she will try to anger you so that your view is discredited not only on the merit of the facts, but also by your confrontational manner.

Radio:

All interviews designed to be broadcast exclusively by radio are virtually identical in conduct. Whether the interview takes place at a studio, in your office, or over the telephone whether it is live or taped, you'll answer the reporter's questions

by speaking into his or her microphone. It may be a casual conversation or a response to questions during an accident response. The reporter may be an advocate of your position or hostile to your point of view. Radio reporters can select from any of the approaches used by their television counterparts.

Combined Media:

Press Conferences

When you want to put out some information to a large number of reporters simultaneously, your public affairs staff will arrange a press conference. You or an expert on the subject to be discussed will make an opening statement or give an in-depth briefing if the situation calls for it. Following your introduction of the facts, the remainder of the session is a question-answer period in which you or your representative respond to reporters' queries. A word of caution with regards to press conferences, however. The gravity of the issue should dictate whether a press conference is the best avenue to meet with the media. An ill-advised press conference may attract media attraction attention that you never intended. We'll talk more about how to conduct a press conference later. This expert should be aware that along with appropriate questions, reporters may pose questions not within the purview of his or her knowledge or responsibilities. Hence, this individual should be prepared before hand regarding this possibility.

Media availabilities

Similar to a press conference, a media availability involves a mix of print and electronic journalists at the same time. Unlike a press conference, however, the media availability is not focused on a particular issue. These sessions occur most often when an expert on a specific subject is passing through a town, and the media are extended an invitation to discuss the latest developments in this person's area of expertise.

Public Affairs Staff Liaison with Reporters:

In addition to your contact with reporters, the public affairs staff works with the media on a daily basis. The staff regularly sends news releases to journalists and provides answers to reporters' queries. Public affairs people meet with journalists downtown and host reporters whenever they come onto the base. In some locations, units provide orientation flights for reporters. For your protection, make sure any contact you have with the media is coordinated with the public affairs staff in advance.

Polled again

In a poll conducted May-June 1999 by the Council for Excellence in Government, 1,214 adults were asked to rate their confidence of nine institutions in American society. The results were: (in percentages)

	Great deal	Quite a lot	Some	Very little	Not sure
The military	29	30	27	10	4
National news media	8	10	41	40	1

PREPARING FOR THE INTERVIEW

Just as a pilot goes through an extensive preflight session before flying a mission, so too should you devote some time and energy to preparing for media interviews. The extent to which you're ready for an interview will have a direct bearing on the success or failure of your discussion with a reporter. The right amount of research and practice will allow you to be more confident and comfortable during the interview. And, if you feel good going into the interview, you'll be better able to get your story across to those who count most: the people reading the article or watching the newscast. Here are a few tips on preparing yourself for an interview.

Learn about the reporter

Your public affairs officer should be able to provide you the background of the journalist who will interview you. Find out where the reporter went to school and what media outlets he or she has worked for prior to the current job. If your interview is for a newspaper or magazine, read some of the reporter's previous articles on the subject you'll be discussing. If you're going to do a radio or television interview, listen to or watch tapes of previous broadcasts. In this way, you'll know the journalist's style and point of view before you sit down for your discussion.

Know your audience

The key to remember when preparing for an interview is to plan, plan, plan!

Sometimes the person being interviewed mistakenly believes the reporter is the audience. Not true! Your audience is composed of the people who read the newspaper or magazine, watch the TV or listen to the radio. The news media are merely the conduit, albeit filter, to your audience. Regardless of the interviewer's knowledge of the military, your discussion must be at a level the audience can understand. Again, your public affairs officer should tell you the composition of the audience who will see your interview in print, or on the air and the familiarity of these people with the topic you'll be discussing.

Remember the Big Picture

When engaging the media, remember you are always a member of the U.S. Air Force. So when you talk about your job, unit, mission, people or aircraft, make sure you say how they fit into the Air Force big picture. Following are our Air Force vision, values and core competencies:

- **U.S. Air Force Mission Statement**
  To defend the United States and protect its interests through aerospace power

- **U.S. Air Force Core Values**
  Integrity first
  Service before self
  Excellence in all we do

- **U.S. Air Force Vision:**
Global Vigilance, Reach and Power

- **U.S. Air Force Core Competencies**
  Aerospace Superiority
  Global Attack
  Rapid Global Mobility
  Precision Engagement
  Information Superiority
  Agile Combat Support

Set the ground rules

Your public affairs officer and the reporter should agree to the ground rules before the interview, and your PAO should ensure you're aware of the rules. The main consideration here is to agree on what areas can be discussed so you're not blindsided with a question from out of the blue (although a few journalists may ignore the ground rules once the interviews begins). Also establish the length of the session. It's better to arrange a short interview and then to add more time if you wish than it is to agree to a time that is too long and then allow the reporter to fill it with off-the-wall questions. Many reporters will ask you if it would be okay to tape the interview, in addition to taking notes. This is fine and can enhance the accuracy of the final story. In turn, you and your public affairs officer may ask the reporter if you could also tape the conversation.

Consider the three or four main issues you want to address and what you want your audience to know about these issues.

Finally, you and the reporter also need to agree on how you will be quoted in the story. You should settle on one of the following before the interview begins:

- **On the record:** Reporter can use everything you say and attribute it to you by name and title. This often is the best and most recommeded method.

- **Off the record:** Reporter can't use anything you say. Be *extremely* careful when going off the record.

- **Background:** Reporter will use information but won't attribute it to you, e.g., an Air force spokesperson.

Plan your key points

Once you begin talking with a reporter, it's too late to determine what points you want to make. You have to do this before the interview. Preparation is key to being both credible and effective in an interview. Gen. Dick Hawley, former Air Combat Command commander, summed it up when he said, "I would no sooner do a media interview without preparing than fly a combat mission over Baghdad without preparing."

Theme and message development in concert with accurate information is the single most important part of the interview process. Whether you have the luxury of hours or days prior to the interview or only minutes to prepare, theme and message develop-

ment is a necessity in today's sound-bite oriented-media arena. Your theme is your overriding mission or purpose for the interview. You should develop three or four strong messages that support your theme or position. Messages are important because when prepared correctly and used in a preemptive manner they can often counteract the messages of our critics.

Your theme and messages should promote your agenda. Never, never lie or twist the truth! Truth is the gold standard for the Air Force. Credibility is built and earned over a period years; however, it can be destroyed overnight. Your truthful messages should be simple, focused, and limited in number. The facts (i.e., who what, where, when, how and [sometimes why]) need to support the messages you've given.

Positive messages can come out of negative events. If you're getting to the bottom of an issue or trying to fix the problem, that's positive -- use it as a message. And use these messages over and over again throughout the course of your interview. We'll talk more later about some techniques we may employ to inject messages into the interview.

Get some coaching

After you've come up with your messages, ask your public affairs officer to set up a mock interview in which he or she plays the role of reporter. This is particularly important when the subject of the interview is sensitive or controversial. Go over the questions you expect, and also have your PAO throw some tough, unexpected questions at you. Rehearse your responses, and develop ways to get your main points across. Make sure your comments are honest, meaningful, and to the point. Refine your key points if it seems they won't grab the audience's attention. Avoid memorizing statements. You'll be more natural and convincing during the actual interview if you answer questions spontaneously.

Find Out What's Happening

On the day of the interview, make sure you read the local newspaper and watch the news on TV before you talk with the reporter. This is especially important if you're on the road away from home. If you don't do this, you may be surprised when the interviewer asks you a question on the military prompted by a story that broke the night before. Even if you can't go into detail on a response, you don't want to appear shocked by being asked to address a subject you've heard nothing about.

"A shot from the hip can hit you in the foot."
-- David J. Shea and John F. Gullick
Media Isn't a Four Letter Word

Responding To Media Questions

Whether you're working with a reporter from the print or electronic media, following a few hints will permit you to come across as professionally as possible during interviews. These techniques will take some practice to perfect, but as you master them, you'll find that responding to journalists' questions will become much easier.

Here are several tips on what to do and what to avoid when you meet the media.

DO

- Speak in headlines. Make short, simple, and specific statements. Use your messages at every opportunity. State your messages first then fill in the details.
- Employ bridging, flagging, and hooking to move from the reporter's question into an area you want to discuss.

Bridging: involves answering the question the reporter asks and then shifting the conversation to a related point YOU want to make. Your transition might be, "…and closely tied with what we've just been discussing is …." or "yes, this weapons development program is expensive but look at the capability that money buys

Flagging: is simply highlighting an important point as you make it with your voice intonations, gestures or body language. For instance, you might say, "… and the most crucial aspect of the project is …." Or you may use gestures or lean-in to emphasize a point.

Hooking: occurs when you put your message right up front in your answer or during a pause between one of your answer and the next question. As the reporter scans his or her list of questions, you might suggest, "Something we haven't addressed that has a significant bearing on the issues is..." Reporters aren't shy. You can't afford to be either.

During an interview, take the time to 'respond' to reporter's questions. A response is the answer to the reporter's question plus a positive message you want to get to the audience.

- Anticipate every possible negative question, and have answers ready. Be prepared for that tough question "nobody has ever asked before."
- Take a second or two to think about your answers. Not only do rapid responses appear rehearsed, but interview subjects often regret providing an answer they didn't give enough thought to. Pauses always seem much longer to you than to the reporter doing the interview or the folks watching you on TV.
- Be positive about the reporter and the questions. Take the view that the journalist is a your only avenue (and it often is) to the people you want to understand your messages. Think of the interview as an opportunity, not as a threat or a confrontation. Regardless of the question, you can always find a way to make a positive point and the bridging technique helps you do this.
- Make your answer interesting yet simple. As a veteran public relations expert once said, The longer your message has to travel, the simpler it needs to be. Remember not to harp on the unsavory event which has ocurred but simply provide some explanation of how the Air Force plans to fix the or alleviate the problem. Use personal experiences in your reponses so those who read, view, or listen to the story can relate to you and those you represent as "real people," not automatons or some faceless bureaucracy in uniform. Furthermore, a reporter often can't argue against one's personal experience.
- When given a multiple-part question, answer the one segment that allows you to make a positive point. Ignore the others. If the interviewer wants to return to unanswered questions, he or she will.
- Speak conversationally. You're not presenting a military briefing.
- Do your best to come across as warm, helpful, and sincere, especially when discussing an accident or controversial incident.
- Be relaxed, confident and honest. If you don't know the answer to a question admit it. Promise to get back to the reporter with an answer, and then make sure you deliver.
- Discuss only information within your area of responsibility -- stay in your lane!
- Always try to end on a positive note.

DON'T

- Don't just answer questions – respond to them. A response to a question is the answer to the question plus the positive message you want to get across to the audience. If the interviewer permits, take about 30 seconds for your response to a television reporter. You can go into more detail for a print journalist. Use one of your main points to add specifics to a short answer. Once you've made your point, stop talking and wait for the next question.
- Don't say anything off the record. Any time a reporter is within earshot, he or she may use something you've said, with or without your permission. Even in talking with journalists you've worked with in the past, responding to off-the-record questions can come back to haunt you.

- Begin with gratuitous phrases, such as, "I'm glad you asked that question."
- Be curt, even with questions you feel are stupid. Gen. Colin Powell, former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, once noted: "the interviewee is the only one at risk in this dual. The media report only stupid or careless answers, not stupid or unfair questions."
- Feel compelled to justify your opinions with statistics or other evidence. Usually, as long as you identify an opinion as an opinion, you'll have nothing to worry about. Ask your PAO prior to the interview if there is a policy to avoid presenting your opinion on the topic you'll be discussing.

Confidence when talking to the media shows the American people how professional and powerful their Air Force is.

- Talk about something you're not familiar with. If you improvise to avoid looking ignorant, you may get into trouble.
- Use jargon, acronyms and technical terms. Instead, speak in language and use examples and comparisons the audience will understand. How would you explain it to your grandparents?
- Repeat inaccurate statements in a reporter's question prior to answering it. Instead, rephrase the question in your own words, and then give a positive response.
- Let an outrageous accusation or statement go unchallenged. Refute it politely, offering a brief explanation, then bridge to an issue you want to discuss.
- Use verbal pauses ("um, er, uh,"). You often don't realize you're doing this, so have your PAO watch for these distracters during practice sessions.
- Give a "no comment" response. If you're unsure of the answer or can't discuss it, say so and say why. Admit an area is classified or covered by the Privacy Act, and move on to something else. In the minds of today's audiences, "no comment" equates to "I'm guilty…"
- Volunteer information, unless it supports a positive point you want to make. If a negative topic comes up, address it briefly, and then describe the positive steps now under way to handle the problem.
- Be defensive. Don't argue with the reporter, and be careful not to lose your composure. Remember the journalist is simply doing his or her job. It's nothing personal! (This is especially important in interviews during crises and people are under stress.)
- Let anyone put words in your mouth. Agree only if the facts and figures are the truth.
- Lie. Answer as honestly and completely as you can. The Air Force's reputation and public trust rests on your veracity. It takes years to build the public's confidence; however, it can be lost almost overnight due to careless and dishonest words and actions.

WATCHING OUT FOR SNEAKY TACTICS

The table below lists the most common types of interview questions and provides a few techniques for handling them. Keep these suggestions in mind as you prepare for your chat with a reporter, and use them during your interview. These techniques should help you become an excellent representative for your unit.

Type of Question | **Techniques**

Puffball
(any "easy" question)

- Acknowledge the question
- Don't pass up the chance to include one of your messages

Example:
Q: Are the young men and women entering the Air Force today better or worse than they were 10 years ago?
***A*:** The young men and women we're recruiting today are undoubtedly the best-educated, brightest people we've ever attracted. In fact, this month alone, applicants in our recruiting district have had the highest test scores we've seen in the past decade.

Hypothetical

Example:
Q: What would happen if the Air Force budget were reduced by, say, five percent?
A: Well, one can't foresee the future. I can tell you, however, that the Air Force is committed to spending taxpayers' dollars in the wisest possible way. I assure you that all of us in this unit will continue to do our best to give Americans the best possible return on their investment in national defense.

False Facts/
False Assumptions
Putting Words in Your Mouth

- Never repeat mistaken information
- Discount the false facts or assumptions by bridging to a positive point
- If the interviewer returns to the incorrect information, briefly and politely correct the record.

Example:
Q: So what you're saying is that the base is responsible for more than 50 percent of the community's oil spills?
A: No, that's not correct. What I said was that the base's oil containment team has had to respond to 50 percent fewer incidents this year.

Leading or Loaded

- Don't repeat the interviewer's statement
- Set the record straight, but don't dwell on the leading or loaded questions
- Bridge to a key message

Example:
Q: I understand the Finance Center lost 5,000 pay records this month. Is that correct?
A: Not at all. That center's internal audit system is set up to stop problems before they happen. In fact, this is the third year in a row of error-free accounting for our Finance Center.

Factual

- If the information is correct, say so
- If the information is incorrect, disagree tactfully and provide facts
- End with a positive message

Example:
Q: Wasn't there a big fire this morning at the fuel depot on your base ?
A: That's right. Workers were disassembling an unused fuel storage tank, and sparks from a cutting torch ignited the fumes. Fortunately, the base fire chief had anticipated such a situation and had a team on site. The fire department crew put out the fire within three minutes of their arrival. Realistic training paid big dividends out there today.

Forced Choices

- Don't agree if both choices are incorrect
- Tell the "real story"
- Make the information as positive as possible

Example:
Q: Did the general commit suicide because he was gay or because he was having problems with his wife?
A: First, let me say that this incident has affected everyone on base. The general's death is under investigation at this time, so no one yet knows how he died. General Smith had many outstanding achievements during his career and his leadership will be missed.

LIGHTS, CAMERA, ACTION!

Once you've learned the basics of being interviewed, it will be just as easy for you to talk with a journalist in front of a camera in a television studio as it is to chat with a newspaper reporter in the security of your office. You will want to be prepared for a few unique aspects of a television interview, so read through the following hints before your screen debut.

Pre-taping Reconnaissance

Your first few visits to a TV studio can be discomforting and possibly intimidating. Plan to arrive early so you can take a look around and become familiar with the way the studio will be arranged. Before you sit down for the interview, you should have completed these steps:

- As soon as you arrive, stop by the restroom and check your appearance. You may not have time or you may forget if you wait until after you're escorted to the set where the interview will take place.
- Once on the set, take a look around and see where the lights, cameras, and monitors are located. Be careful not to trip over the cables as you move around the set.
- Chat with the crew about their jobs, and talk with the show's producer, if he or she is available, to see if any new issues you may be asked about have come up.
- Find out the seating arrangements in advance. Arrange to sit next to the host if other guests will be on the set at the same time you'll be interviewed.
- Before you sit down, loosen up a bit. Roll your shoulders and neck back and forth, stretch your arms, and get relaxed. Be physically loose, and try to clear your mind of anything that would be a distraction during the interview.
- Sit in the chair you'll be sitting in during the interview, and find out where the monitor is positioned. Once you've seen how you look in the monitor, don't look at it again until the interview is over. You should be gazing into the eyes of the host or hostess, not watching yourself on TV.
- Talk with the person who will interview you. Ask about the issues on the agenda for the interview, and see how these correspond to what you rehearsed. Before the taping begins, mention specific points you'd like to discuss.
- If you'll be taking questions from the audience in the studio or the folks at home, make sure you know the procedures for this phase of the show.

Be physically loose, and try to clear your mind of anything that would be a distraction during the interview.

Remember that occasionally the reporter will come to you. This permits you to control the interview setting. Pick a location that will show off the mission of your base or unit, and make sure everything that will be visible in the background is neat and tidy. Make sure your interview site isn't so noisy that voices being recorded will be drowned out.

Speak Into the Mike

Anyone who has been "miked" before isn't threatened by the procedure. However, the first time or two can be intimidating. When appearing on a television interview, keep in mind a few pointers about using the microphone.

First and foremost, remember that any time you're **near** a microphone, whether or not it's attached to you, it could be live. **Never say anything you might regret**, even if the cameras supposedly aren't on. President Reagan's "We begin bombing in five minutes" is an excellent example of a case in which speaking into a live microphone caused a great deal of embarrassment.

For most interviews, a stage assistant will help you position the clip-mike. If you're instructed to put on your own mike, think of it as a tie clasp with a small ornament mounted on the front. Open the clip and fasten it to your necktie, if you're wearing one, with the mike facing outward. If you're not wearing a tie, fasten the mike to your jacket, shirt, or blouse lapel. In either case, place the microphone about a hand-span beneath your chin. If you have a choice, attach the mike so it is on the side of you closer to the interviewer. Always stretch the excess wire straight down to your waist, tuck it into your waistband or belt, and run the remainder behind you under your jacket.

The mike check can be stressful if you're not prepared. The audio engineer in the production booth will ask, "Can we get a level on the guest?" It may take a couple of seconds for you to realize he's talking about you. (STRESS!) Then you start wondering what to do or say. Perhaps you recall someone, somewhere once saying, "Testing, one, two, three." (STRESS!) So you try it, and the engineer suddenly says, "Could we have more please." (STRESS!) Now what do you say? "Four, five, six"?

There's no need to subject yourself to this pressure. When you're asked for a mike check, say something you know you can say easily, something that will help both you and the interviewer to get off to a positive start. Say your rank and name, pronouncing it carefully so the interviewer will hear it. (Particularly if you have one of those names that people tend to mispronounce, or tend to accent incorrectly.) Then give your position title and the name of your organization. Cap this off with a few seconds' worth of a positive point you are there to discuss. When the engineer has heard enough to adjust the sound levels, he'll cut you off. This doesn't mean you can't finish your sentence, as long as you're brief.

Ensuring a Professional Appearance

How you look on camera can be just as important as what you say.

How you look on camera can be just as important as what you say. Hard to believe, but true. Of the total message you get across on camera, only about 7 percent is what you say. Just less than 40 percent is picked up based on the quality of your voice, and 55 percent gets through by nonverbal communication. Remember, you're representing the Air Force and, in some cases, the entire Department of Defense. It's worth the extra effort to look your best. While you can't change what is "naturally yours," you can look sharp by following a few hints. These suggestions apply both to people in uniform as well as to those in civilian clothes.

- ***Get your hair cut*** several days prior to the interview, not the day before. A haircut too close to the taping session may leave white marks around your neck, forehead, and ears and may also make your hair look "flyaway" on camera.
- If you have a heavy beard, ***shave before you go to the studio***.
- Military members should usually ***wear their service dress uniforms*** with a long-sleeve shirt. Make sure ribbons, nametag, and insignia are straight and in good shape. Also ensure your tie or tie tab is neatly positioned.
- ***Arrive early***, and check your appearance.
- ***Ask for makeup*** to help control perspiration and to reduce the glare from your skin under the lights. If none is available at the studio, a man who is going to be interviewed would be well advised to swallow his misgivings and purchase some makeup that will match his skin tone. Apply a light cover, and, if you perspire easy, blot your skin shortly before the interview begins. Women should wear the same makeup they wear every day. Don't apply it more heavily than usual. In addition, you want to look natural on camera, so avoid extra blush, lipstick, and eye makeup. If, after all this, you still perspire, touch off sweat only when you're sure the camera is not on you.
- During ***sit-down interviews, keep all buttons on your uniform jacket buttoned***. If you're wearing civilian clothes, unbutton your suit jacket. In either case, remove wrinkles in the front of your jacket by pulling it down in the rear and sitting on the tail. Make sure your shirt sleeves peek out from under your jacket sleeves. If you're doing a ***stand-up interview***, button your jacket, whether you're in uniform or civilian clothes.
- If you have a choice when wearing civilian clothes, ***wear light-colored shirts or blouses***.
- ***Wear over-the-calf socks*** so your shiny shins won't be visible.
- Keep jewelry simple. Those diamonds may look terrific at a party, but on television they will detract.
- If in uniform, ***slightly dull your brass***. The same applies for shiny, wire-rimmed glasses.
- ***Wear your eyeglasses*** only if you can't see without them. This will make you more comfortable. Also wear your glasses if you have deep marks in your face from wearing them all the time. You don't want those to show on camera. If you wear your glasses, tilt them down slightly, being careful not to hide your eyes. This eliminates your glasses reflecting the glare of the studio lights.
- If civilian clothes are appropriate for a man being interviewed, ***wear medium-tone gray, brown, or blue suits***. Women wearing civilian clothes should choose solid, medium-color dresses. Conservative, street-length (at the knee) dresses or pantsuits are preferred. Women must make sure their knees are covered when they sit down.
- Don't wear any of the following:
  - ***Sunglasses***, indoors or outdoors. If the viewer can't see the interviewee's eyes, his credibility as a speaker is lessened.
  - ***Tinted or photo-gray lenses*** on camera; the lights turn them very dark, and

you never want to hide your eyes.

- ***A vest***
- ***Stripes or checks***. Solid colors or pinstripes are best.
- ***White clothing***. It is difficult for the technical crew to adjust contrasts.
- ***Bow ties***. They tend to bob when you're talking.
- ***Very light or very dark dresses***.
- ***Short skirts***. It doesn't fit the military image. If viewers are staring at your legs, they're not listening to your messages.

When the Camera Is Rolling

Recalling that the image you present is among the most important factors in any on-camera interview, when the interview is in progress you will want to make sure your body language doesn't distract viewers. The following techniques will help you to appear more comfortable. They may take some work to perfect, but the more familiar you are with these suggestions, the more easily they'll come to you when you're under the stress of an interview.

- ***Sit toward the edge of your chair*** with your back straight and your hands relaxed in your lap. To demonstrate involvement and conviction, lean slightly towards the interviewer. This may feel uncomfortable, but it makes you look interested and alert on camera. Keep your elbows off the chair arms. Don't swivel in your chair unless it's appropriate given the format of the interview (for example, when you're appearing in a panel discussion). **Don't cross your legs**. Distribute your body weight equally on both feet so your diaphragm can work at its best. Don't spread your knees apart while seated; keep them together.
- ***Gesture frequently***. Gestures make you look comfortable and will constructively channel your nervous energy. Keep your gestures natural and close to your body so the camera can pick them up. Otherwise, they may appear wild or frantic. Put down objects that you maybe holding and don't need for the interview (e.g., notes, pens, hats, etc.) because they'll inhibit natural gestures.
- ***Stand up straight*** in stand-up interviews. Keep your hands at your sides when not gesturing. Be careful not to rock back and forth. Don't back away when the reporter puts the microphone in your face.
- ***Avoid distracting movements***. Be careful not to look at your watch, fiddle with jewelry or loose change in your pocket, or pull at your socks. In addition, don't be distracted by noises or movements on the set.
- ***Concentrate on the interviewer***. Listen to what he or she is saying, and maintain eye contact with the person, not the camera. If it's difficult for you to look straight into the interviewer's eyes, choose a spot — the nose, eyebrows, or an ear, for example — so it will look to the audience as if you have constant eye contact. Don't gaze around the studio while you're answering a question, as if you're searching for a response. Rolling your eyes, looking into the air or down at the floor, or darting your eyes back and forth can present a dishonest look on camera.

- ***Keep your head up so you won't look guilty***. This is especially important if your wear glasses. Open your eyes a little wider than normal to show interest and animation. Avoid squinting under the studio lights.
- ***Avoid nodding your head when***, for example, you understand a question. It may erroneously signal you agree with what the reporter is saying.
- ***Breathe deeply*** from your diaphragm. If you don't you'll run out of air at the end of sentences, and the last few words will be inaudible. Don't touch the microphone or lean toward it in an exaggerated manner while answering a question, and don't play with the mike cord.
- ***Smile***, unless the interview concerns a serious accident or incident. During a crisis, reflect the proper concern and demonstrate that you're in control of the situation.
- Tell the director and cameraman if you have a genuine ***physical reason for preferring one profile*** rather than the other (for example, a hearing problem).

Answering Questions on Television:

The pointers listed in the Responding to Questions section apply for both print and electronic interviews. In addition to those suggestions, here are a few reminders for interviews in front of the camera.

"Reporters don't write 'the truth,' they interpret what we know and what people tell us."

-- Ben Bradlee
Former executive editor The Washington Post

- First impressions are crucial. Be sure to ***thank the person who introduces you*** before you begin to answer questions.
- Know how long you can talk without the interviewer cutting you off. Usually ***45 seconds is the maximum length*** for any one statement. Most interviews last no more than 6 to 7 minutes. This limited time will not permit you to go into a lengthy historical narrative. ***Get to the point quickly***, and present the facts in a way that will grab viewers attention. If you can briefly address the who, what where, when, why, and how in your opening reply, and hammer home a key message, then do it. You may not get a second chance.
- **Never just answer a question –** you may be giving up an opportunity to get your pre-planned messages across. Rather, respond to the question. A response consists of the answer being sought, and the message you want to send the audience. You should strive to include one of your messages in every answer you give. It may appear mechanical or redundant, but it works!
- Once you've responded to an interviewer's question fully and accurately, its perfectly all right to ***remain silent***. Remember it's the interviewer's responsibility to keep the conversation going. Occasionally, a host or hostess will deliberately hesitate in asking another question, hoping you'll continue. When the interview subject feels that he or she must add information, this is often the time mistakes are made. Ensure each answer is ***accurate, complete and thoughtful,*** and then wait for the next question. *Of course, if there is an important message or point you want to get across and haven't had the opportunity to make it,*

you **CAN EMPLOY THE HOOK** *at this point, leading the conversation to that critical bit of information you want to get out.*

- In an informal interview, use the ***reporter's first name***, but don't overdo it. If the interview will appear as an edited newscast, it's best to avoid using the journalist's name.
- If your answers are being taped as part of an edited interview, you have the option of ***stopping in the middle of an answer*** and starting over if you feel you can provide a better response. In general, reporters have no problem allowing you to redo an answer and will use the improved version.
- ***If you're ambushed, take your time***. Identify yourself, and ask for the reporter's name and affiliation. If a camera, microphone, or tape recorder is shoved in your face, ask the reporter to step back and give you room. This gives you time to get your composure. Set a time limit. For example, offer to answer one or two questions. When you're done, move on without looking back or talking over your shoulder.

Always consider any encounter with the media as "on the record." Never say anything you don't want to see in print or on the air, because tape recorders and cameras continue to record even when an interview appears to have concluded.

CONDUCTING A NEWS CONFERENCE

The news conference is an excellent way to provide information simultaneously to all media, provided the story is newsworthy. Although a news conference is seldom justified, it is appropriate in cases of important, controversial matters; complex issues on which reporters will need background information; or situations in which discussion rather than a one-sided statement is necessary. The news conference permits you to answer the questions of a large number of reporters at one time rather than scheduling several individual interviews.

Planning the News Conference:

As in all contact with the media, effective planning is the key to a successful news conference. Consider these rules in preparing to host a large group of reporters:

- ***Invite reporters who you think will have an interest in the story***. Consider local, regional, national, and international media outlets. Make sure to include radio, television, magazine, newspaper, and wire service reporters as appropriate.
- ***Select a handy location*** for media reps. Reporters need easy access to the conference site, and they may want to make a quick getaway to file their stories.
- ***Choose a senior official to serve as spokesman***. Ensure that experts and specialists on the subject to be discussed are present to answer questions beyond the scope of the spokesman's knowledge. Brief all participants in advance on the questions reporters are likely to ask, and take the time prior to the conference to practice answers to these questions.
- ***Phone the media to invite reporters to the conference***. If written invitations are used, they should be informal and followed up by a phone calls to determine if the journalist will attend.
- ***Consider the logistics***. Ensure telephones, telefax machines, internet connectivity, paper, and working space are available. Arrange for public address equipment if necessary.
- ***Prepare media kits with information and photos*** concerning the subject to be discussed, and pass these out as reporters enter the conference site. Construct exhibits, charts, or demonstrations that will support what the briefing covers.
- ***Provide written material*** to reporters who were not able to attend.

How to Conduct the News Conference:

For most people, a one-on-one interview is threatening enough. A situation in which one person is outnumbered by a room full of reporters can produce even more anxiety. Those serving as spokesmen should keep these pointers in mind.

- Have your public affairs officer introduce you, ***outline the guidelines*** for how the conference will be conducted, and announce up front the time limit for the session.

- ***Begin with an opening statement***. It can be as long or as short as you like, but make sure it thoroughly addresses the issue and contains the key points and messages you want to make.
- ***Select one reporter at a time*** to ask his or her question. Do this by looking this person straight in the eyes, pointing at the journalist, and verbally acknowledging that you're ready for his or her question. Focus primarily on the reporter who asked the question while you answer it.
- ***Don't allow one reporter to dominate the session***. Make sure you give as many journalists an opportunity to ask their questions as time permits.
- ***Stick to the subject***. If a reporter brings up a separate issue, gently remind the group of the topic for the news conference, and offer to discuss other matters at another time.
- Talk from the perspective of the ***American Public's Interest***, not from the viewpoint of the military's interest. Tell your audience how the nation benefits, not what the military stands to gain.
- ***Commit two or three main points to memory*** you want to make during the conference, and use them often during the question - answer session. Don't be afraid to repeat these points. Like in the edited interview, the more often you mention them, the more likely they'll be included in the media's coverage.
- If the reporter phrases a question or statement in words you find offensive, don't repeat them in your answer, not even to deny them. ***Rephrase the journalist's comments to remove the negative angle***.
- ***Always be honest***, even when the truth hurts. It's better to acknowledge a problem and to discuss corrective measures now than it is to try to explain later why you tried to cover up something. You may get beat up, but you'll only get beaten up once. Similarly, don't exaggerate the facts. Reporters have a habit of sticking with a story when they smell a rat, and more often than not, lies and exaggerations are exposed. Follow-up news stories now will not only include the original bad news but also the fact that someone lied or covered up.
- ***Remain calm***. Don't be distracted by the cluttered room, reporters moving in and out, and camera flashes going off around you. In addition, don't become confrontational with the reporter who is a bit obnoxious. Firmly and courteously maintain control over the discussion. The American people will expect you to be the military professional in this exchange.
- ***Don't attempt to respond to a question when you don't know the answer***. In these cases, promise to check into the matter and to provide an answer as soon as possible. Reporters will appreciate your honesty, and you won't be quoted on something that turns out to be inaccurate. Be sure to get back with the reporter in a timely manner.
- ***Avoid technical terms and military jargon***. Speak in terms you're sure the average American will understand.

- ***Don't respond to hypothetical questions***. Stick to what has happened and what you're sure will happen, and avoid discussion of what might happen given a particular scenario by a reporter.
- End the news conference when the questioning begins to die out or it sounds too repetitious. In your final response you may wish to recap your key messages, thus leaving the podium on your terms and on a high note.

Your Physical Presence:

- ***Wear your service dress uniform***. It looks neater on television, and the ribbons and insignia give you instant credibility with a public that has high regard for the military. If civilian clothes are appropriate, wear medium-tone gray, blue, or brown suits or dresses.
- ***Be enthusiastic***. Maintain an upbeat approach throughout the session.
- ***Use gestures often*** to break up the visual monotony of a person standing behind a podium. Keep your hands out of your pockets and avoid the death grip on the podium. Don't feel you have to remain glued to the lectern. If you feel comfortable, step out from behind it during the question-answer period.
- ***Control and vary the pace of your answers***. Avoid talking in a monotone.

"If only the media were just simple observers of war. Like it or not, in this information age, they have become participants and sometimes their coverage can even provide a catalyst which produces dramatic shifts in political and military decision-making - as with mortar attacks on Sarajevo's market or with a dead American airman being dragged through a warlord's camp in Somalia. This prompted the then British Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd in September 1993 to assert categorically that 'the public debate is run not by events, but by the coverage of events.'"

-- Philip M. Taylor
University of Leeds (speech in 1995)

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

When you and the media part company, your usual reaction will be that the interview process is complete. Don't be premature in drawing this conclusion. Consider these actions if they're necessary following your session with a reporter.

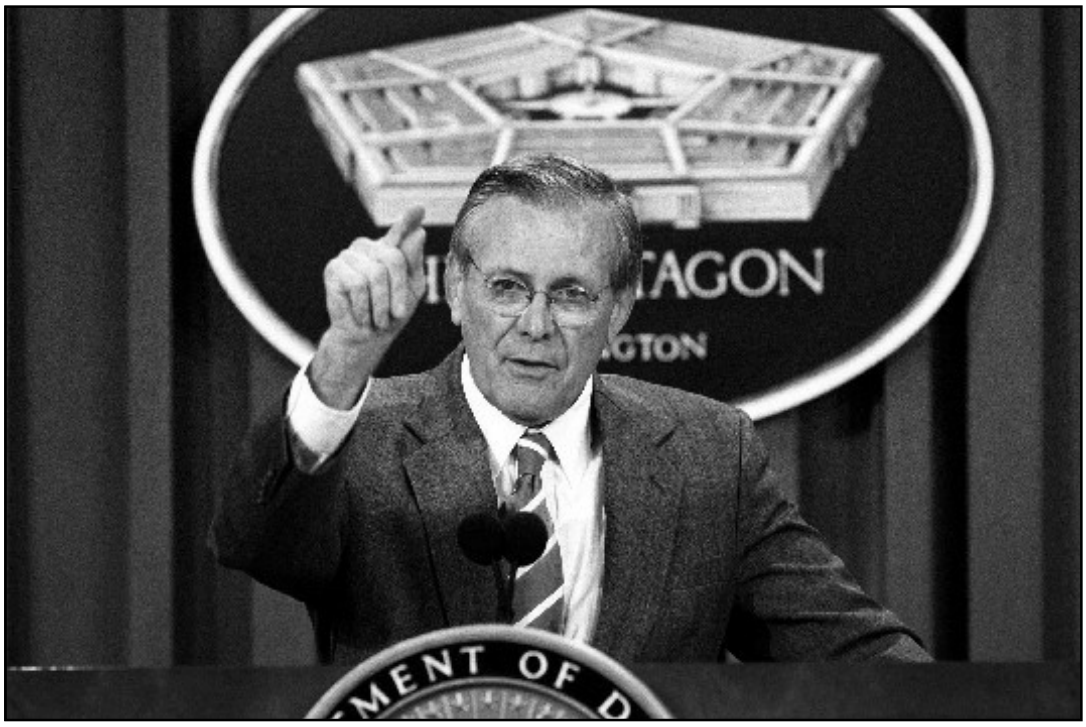
- Once you have spoken to the reporter, you have relinquished the right to censor what he or she uses in a story. You may, however, ***offer to assist the journalist in checking for and ensuring accuracy*** before the story is published or aired, especially if the topic is highly technical or complex. Don't be surprised, through, if the reporter politely declines this help. They usually will!
- The journalist may need more information to complete the story. You may have promised to get back to the reporter with additional facts, or he or she may phone the public affairs staff asking for details. In either case, be sure to ***provide any necessary clarification as soon as possible***. If you delay, important facts may be omitted from the story. The story will be aired that evening or printed the following morning whether you like it or not. If your staff takes too long to gather and coordinate your answers, it may be too late and it's old news as far as the media is concerned. The best advice is to tell the reporter all you know, as fast as you can and at least get the Air Force's side of the story told.
- If, when the story comes out, it contains errors or takes something you said out of context, ***phone the reporter and explain the mistake***. If he or she seems uncooperative, move up the chain of command to the editor or news director. In some cases, you may have to go all the way to the publisher or station manager. Don't expect a retraction, but be satisfied in the knowledge the media folks understand your concern, and, most of the time, will be a bit more careful in writing the next story. Reputable reporters pride themselves on the accuracy of their stories. A sloppy reporter usually doesn't keep his or her job for very long.

SUMMARY

There you have it. You now know the basics to know to work effectively with the media. You should understand more about reporters and their methods than you did before reading this handbook. You've learned how to prepare for your meetings with journalists and the techniques you can use during these sessions. You appreciate the important role of your public affairs staff in this process.

Will all this knowledge eliminate the anxiety you feel the next time you're asked to do an interview? Probably not. But over time and with some practice, you'll become much more comfortable in carrying out your important responsibility of working with the media to provide Americans information they need to know. Additionally, the Air Force will benefit greatly as the public learns key messages about the armed forces through media coverage your interviews produce.

Take the time to prepare adequately. Meet the media confidently. Treat reporters respectfully and professionally. Answer their questions with candor and honesty. See their requests for an interview as an opportunity, not something to avoid. Besides, it's part of your job. Then sit back and watch with pride as Americans develop a greater appreciation for the Air Force through what you've told them through the media.



Talking to the media isn't a science but an art. It takes time and lots of practice to refine effective interview techniques.

HINTS FROM A PUBLIC RELATIONS PROFESSIONAL

For more than two decades, Bob Dilenschneider, former President and Chief Executive Officer for Hill & Knowlton, Inc., one of the world's largest and most respected public relations firms, has aided clients preparing to meet the media. In his book, Power and Influence, Mr. Dilenschneider lists the advice he's passed on to senior officials in more than 40 percent of the Fortune 500 companies. His recommendations are as valid for military leaders as they are for corporate executives.

- ***Don't try to con a reporter or publication.*** Don't pretend you know things you don't. Don't speculate without the proper background. Don't try to manipulate the press. The foundation of your influence with the press is credibility.
- ***Check out the reporter before doing an interview.*** Take the time to research a journalist's background. Review other stories the reporter has done. Try to determine the motives for his or her interview with you.
- ***Help the reporter understand your organization.*** This is especially important for military leaders in that many journalists covering Department of Defense units have little background in the armed forces.
- ***Always treat a reporter with the respect you would afford any human being … who is also a potential adversary.*** Be friendly and upbeat with journalists, never arrogant or overbearing. Never be rude. Also never forget that it's the reporter's job to discover interesting, unique, controversial information.
- ***When you want to sell a story to the press, draw the picture in the first sentence.*** Reporters are always receptive to good story angles, but you must get right to the point to get them to pay attention.
- ***Design the story you want covered.*** Senior officials must work with their public affairs staffs to develop a plan for the coverage of an important issue or event. Releases should be written, interviews scheduled, and background papers designed so they'll "produce" the coverage you desire.
- ***Never forget that good news begets bad news.*** If you garner highly visible praise, you're likely to provoke highly visible raspberries once you slip.
- ***Decide how you want negatives to be covered.*** No matter how perfect your organization may be, a journalist will automatically dig for the questionable angles on a story. Think about what negatives you want to let emerge and how you will explain them with credibility. If you try to conceal your faults, you can be sure a reporter will run to other sources who will discuss your faults.
- ***Don't assume a reporter will produce a story.*** Not every story that is researched appears in the paper or on the six o'clock news. If there is no story, you can often shut down speculation by being open and discussing the facts with a reporter. If you're not quite ready to reveal a major breakthrough, tell the reporter that if he or she holds the story, you'll provide exclusive access to the facts within a week or two.
- ***Never string out a big bad story in hopes that it will go away.*** Put out the facts quickly and completely. By permitting the press to drag out coverage, the story will become even more negative and will be around a lot longer.

- ***Plan press strategy early.*** Deciding to try to dodge the press and deal with them only if the pressure is turned up is not a strategy. As soon as you know the media will be interested in an issue, plan how you will work with reporters. In most cases, it's best to stick with your initial, well-conceived strategy rather than switching to another approach midway into coverage of an issue.

In addition to advice on how to deal with a reporter in general, Mr. Dilenschneider offers these suggestions for taking part in a media interview:

- ***Prepare.*** Have your staff provide you background on the reporter's topic of discussion, including anticipated questions and suggested answers. Also review background information on the reporter, the publication, and previous coverage of your organization. Brainstorm with your staff what negatives a reporter might bring up and how you'll deal with them. Plan your key messages so you'll be prepared to insert them during the interview. Role-play questions and answers before the interview, considering the toughest, nastiest questions you can. This will make these questions less intimidating during the actual interview and will strengthen your answers.
- ***Be credible.*** Make sure what you say can be believed. Don't bluff or pretend.
- ***If you can't talk about something, just say so.*** Be direct when turning down a question, but not hostile. Avoid saying "no comment." Be a bit less formal with a responses like "I'm sorry; I just can't talk about that at this point," or "we won't be able to comment on that until we get more details and have had a chance to study them."
- ***Conduct the interview alertly.*** Reporters may try to put you off guard. Watch for this technique, and be prepared not to let this tactic steer you away from control over the situation.
- ***Dismiss the outrageous.*** If a reporter asks a question that is totally absurd or out of line, control your anger. Respond with "You can't be serious" or "I won't even dignify that question with an answer; now let's get back on course."
- ***Decide in advance if you will allow the reporter to tape the interview.*** Usually there is no reason to turn down a journalist's request to tape an interview. Whether or not the reporter tapes it, it's a good idea for your public affairs officer to sit in and to tape the discussion. This provides a record in case the story is published with mistakes and you want to prove the sloppy journalism. If you agree to talk off the record, all recorders should be turned off.
- ***Think visually about the press.*** Determine if you can provide graphs and charts that would help illustrate your position. Perhaps you can suggest some unique photo possibilities. If the interview is for television, consider moving out of the office to a location that provides an interesting backdrop for the story. Before a photo is taken or the video camera is rolling, take a look around you to ensure nothing distracting, unclean, or compromising is in view.

- ***Avoid "off-the-record" discussion.*** You should always assume that any information you give a reporter might end up published at some time. If you feel you must discuss an issue without being quoted by name, make sure you clearly state the conditions of the interview before you begin to answer questions and that the reporter agrees with these conditions.
- ***Quash rumors coolly, and then track down the source.*** Calmly correct mistaken information, and then try to discover who may have put out these erroneous details and what the motivation may have been. You may have to set the record straight within your organization as well as with a reporter.

Mr. Dilenschneider offers these special hints for television interviews:

- ***Get your message out quickly.*** Television time is different from real time: A minute is an eternity. Viewers won't pay attention to long, drawn-out answers, so respond in concise, clear and simple terms.
- ***Television viewers expect entertainment.*** Any televised message needs life and color to reach its audience. Find a way to express yourself through memorable or amusing anecdotes or analogies, but make sure they're within the realm of experience for those who will be watching.
- ***Know your audience.*** Every program has a target audience or range of audiences. Decide whom you want to reach and how you'll get your points across to this group. Stay focused on your real audience. The interviewer may be more or less knowledgeable than those at home. Keep your remarks on the viewers' level not the interviewer's.
- ***Respect the difference between live and taped television.*** A taped interview that can be edited can be dangerous. Decide in advance what your "must-air" points are, and stress them several times in an edited interview. Keep your points brief and make a point at the beginning of each sentence. Limit these interviews to 15-20 minutes. Remember that any part of any response may be pulled out for the finished segment. Don't make controversial statements that can be lifted out of context easily. Also avoid nodding your head; you can never tell what you may see yourself agreeing to.
- ***Get media training.*** You can never tell when you may be in front of the camera. When offered an opportunity to rehearse television interview techniques in a classroom setting, jump at the chance. It may save you, and your organization, a great deal of embarrassment later.

Paraphrased from Power and Influence by Robert L. Dilenschneider, (Prentice Hall Press, New York, 1990. pp. 185-214)

THE REPORTER'S PERSPECTIVE

In addition to the lessons on dealing with the media suggested by public relations experts, it's instructive to look at a few hints for how this can be done from the perspective of a reporter who has dealt extensively with the military over the years. Richard Halloran, formerly a writer for the New York Times, and now the director of special projects at the East-West Center in Honolulu, offers the following suggestions:

- ***Quit Bellyaching.*** Although military members may not like reporters, constant complaining about the media cannot protect the military from the occasional abuses by the press, nor can it provide a professional working relationship for the reporters who play it straight.
- ***Never Lie.*** The liar will most likely be caught sooner or later. Be honest with journalists, and have a senior official go directly to the top editor or producer if you feel a reporter is likely to go public with sensitive information.
- ***Mind Your Own Business.*** In discussions with the media, stick to what you know and subjects appropriate to your rank and position.
- ***Develop an IFF.*** Just as aircraft have systems to "identify friend or foe," so too do officers need to know about the journalists they're dealing with. Respond to experienced reporters in a courteous, straightforward manner. Approach a novice or sloppy journalist carefully. Refuse to talk with hostile muckrakers unless you absolutely must.
- ***Differentiate.*** Different types of journalists have varying needs. Don't treat a photographer like a video cameraman, or a print reporter like a television reporter. Make sure you know the unique needs of each journalist, then do your best to meet those needs.
- ***Set firm ground rules.*** Before you begin talking with a reporter have an understanding of specific rules of engagement. If a journalist violates the ground rules, let him know you're upset, report the violation to his or her superiors and competitors, and refuse further contact with the reporter.
- ***Speak English.*** Jargon impedes communication. Speak in plain English, and be prepared to explain the meaning of military language.
- ***Anticipate.*** Before signing off on a decision, ask yourself what it will look like on the front page of tomorrow's newspaper. Be prepared to defend your decisions, but keep in mind that in some cases, the best defense may be a preemptive strike by announcing the decision.
- ***React faster.*** If the media give you a chance to make an input into a story, make sure the reporters get your response before the sun goes down (or before their deadline). If an irresponsible reporter prints a story without getting your side, find a way to plow new ground and thus warrant another story with fresh information, including your side of yesterday's story.
- ***Yell about mistakes.*** Don't let mistakes stand. If you do, these errors will be compounded by later stories and in data banks. Ask the reporter to run a correction, and if he or she refuses, continue up the journalist's chain of command.

GUIDELINES FOR RELEASING INFORMATION

Air Force instructions, Department of Defense policies, and Federal laws prescribe limits on the release of information to the public. Before any interview with the media, you must ensure you're aware of the types of information that may not be released.

Public Affairs offices do not unilaterally clear material for public release. They coordinate with other activities to ensure proposed releases do not contain classified information. In addition, with the Air Force's continuing emphasis upon "One Message – Many Voices," security review remains vital to ensure there is no conflict with established policy. Sometimes the Public Affairs officer must seek clearance at higher headquarters. If the material requires Air Staff coordination, it could require three weeks or more to clear. In emergencies, the security review process will do its best to meet legitimate deadlines, but this is the exception. One way to avoid lengthy clearance delays is to use material that already has been released through official channels.

Five categories of information are subject to review. Authors or speakers must clear their work if it:

1. Originates, or is proposed for release, at the seat of the U.S. government.
2. Is, or has the potential to become, an item of national interest or has foreign policy implications.
3. Concerns high-level military, DoD, or U.S. government policy.
4. Concerns subjects of potential controversy among DoD components or with other federal agencies.
5. Concerns any of the following subjects:
   a. Contains technical data, including data developed under contract or independently developed and controlled by the International Traffic in Arms Regulations that may be militarily critical and subject to limited distribution.
   b. New weapons or weapon systems, significant modifications or improvements to existing weapons or weapon systems, equipment or techniques.
   c. Military operations, operations security, and significant exercises.
   d. National Command Authorities; command, control, communica tions, computers and intelligence; information warfare or computer security.
   e. Military activities or applications in space, nuclear weapons, including weapon-effects research; chemical and biological warfare issues; biological and toxin research, high-energy lasers and particle beam technology; arms control treaty implementation.

It is your responsibility to ensure anything you prepare for public release is properly cleared <u>before</u> you release the information. This applies to information placed on the Internet when public access is allowed. Such information is subject to the same Privacy Act and security and policy review restrictions as non-electronic information.

When in doubt, contact your local Public Affairs office.

DoD 5400.7, *Freedom of Information Act Program*, further defines the public's right to know by directing the maximum release of information to the public, subject only to the Privacy Act, legitimate security, lawful privilege, defensible policy, and good taste. It's important to keep in mind the phrasing of the FOIA: **release** all information except . . . , not **withhold** all information except . . . . Furthermore, the act doesn't require that exempted information be withheld. FOIA permits it to be withheld. Keep FOIA in mind when asked ...

Before any interview with the media, you must ensure you're aware of the types of information that may not be released. Public affairs offices have a security and policy review process to protect information, but it can take some time to clear through appropriate agencies. The best thing is to use previously cleared materiel.

One Message – Many Voices:

Prepare for all interviews by developing your own agenda. Go into every interview knowing precisely what you'd like to see in print or on the air. In other words, if you could write the lead for the article, what would it be? Here are some tips on how to develop your agenda.

- Don't just answer reporter's question — respond to it!

  Answer + message = **Response**

- Identify three to five points about your mission or a sensitive issue that you'd like the public to understand. These are your key messages or commercials. Keeping these commercials in mind should help you guide and control the interview.

- Don't wait for the right question to be asked — bridge to your commercials, move beyond the question asked and tell the public what you want them to know.

- Make your commercials short and specific — one to two sentences.

- Write your commercials in clear, easily understood language, free from jargon or complicated, technical language and ensure they are provable assertions or facts that can be independently verified.

- Write your commercials on 3 x 5-inch cards and refer to them as the interview progresses. This is particularly useful in over-the-phone, radio and newspaper or magazine interviews. This may be awkward in television interviews; however, you can sneak a peek at them during a commercial break.

Two cardinal rules for any interview

- ❑ If you don't want to see it in print - or hear it on the air = don't say it!

- ❑ Engage brain before putting mouth in gear!

12 Tips For Air Force Commanders

- **Public Affairs is a mission for everyone in the Air Force, and a function of command for good reason.** It's your program, so don't delegate or avoid it; stay actively involved all the time.
- **Honesty is always the best – and only – policy.** Our credibility with public and internal audiences depends on openness and honesty. Absolute integrity and truth need to be our watchwords – always.
- **Get your Public Affairs officer or staff in on all decision loops in your organization.** The more he or she knows and the sooner he or she knows it, the more he or she can help you, the better advice he or she can give you, the more options you'll have – and the more you'll be able to shape the outcome.
- **Always deal with bad news immediately, openly and honestly.** An organization's reputation – and its leader's – are defined by how you respond to adversity or crisis. It doesn't get better with time – honest. And remember the basic principles of risk communication: admit you did it, say you're sorry, and tell them what you're doing to make sure it doesn't happen again.
- **We must tell our story, everyone in the Air Force must be involved, but you set the pace.** You have to set the example. Do the important and/or tough events your PA recommends.
- **Never, ever pass up an opportunity to tell our story – to your Air Force audience, to your local community and to the public at large**. If you don't, someone else will, and we may not like what they say. This means always be prepared – know your messages!
- **When it comes to communicating the Air Force story, listen to your Public Affairs officer or staff.** He or she has the education, training and experience to provide unique and informed counsel with respect to audience identification, message formulation, public opinion, etc. No one else on your staff has that education, training and experience. If you want a second opinion, call your MAJCOM/PA or SAF/PA.
- **The media are not the enemy.** They are a critical conduit (albeit sometimes filter) to the great American public – and to our own Air Force family – so use them. Develop relationships, understanding and trust, and let them help you tell your story.
- **If you haven't had media training at Air University, your MAJCOM or SAF/PA, get it ASAP!** As an Air Force leader, it's not a question if the media will ever interview you, but when!
- **Prepare for every interview and every speech like a combat mission.** Know your audience and your messages, and how to bridge to them. Anticipate the tough questions; know the answers, and practice, practice, practice.
- **Think globally; act locally.** The world may be a global village, but people still put more stock in local news, so focus your energy on local audiences and media. To be strategic, have your Public Affairs office develop an annual strategic communication plan for your signature, and hold everyone on your leadership team accountable for participating. Remember — you set the pace. You don't have time to be the base newspaper editor. You have dedicated, trained airmen to do that.
- **Your Public Affairs staff deals in bad news and truth.** It's often stuff you won't like or don't want to hear – but pay attention, try to develop a nose for news and a sense for when events could be going "South," keep an open mind, and always ask the Jack Anderson test question before you make a final decision.

Public statements in a crash

- Release as much information as you can, as quickly as you can, as clearly as you can to journalists on the scene.
- Package your information into short "responses" — **never** just answer a question.
- **Answer + Message = Response** to journalist's question — always add a message to the answer — messages are short, positive, truthful, memorable statements.
- Messages are key points you want to communicate to the public, examples:

  - The Air Force regrets the loss of life and injury
  - The Air Force is a close-knit family and the loss of one of our own affects all of us
  - We understand this was a very tragic occurrence and we are all experiencing this sorrow together
  - This was a tragic accident, but there were some real heroes here today
  - The cause of the accident is under investigation
  - A board of officers has been appointed to thoroughly investigate the cause of the crash
  - The aircraft (our base) has an excellent safety record (if true)
  - We ask the public to avoid the accident scene, so cleanup and recovery operations are not hindered
  - Realistic training has inherent risks

- Keep responses short, 15-30 seconds MAX.
- Do not feel obligated to answer every question — you may just want to respond with a message only, but answer the journalists question (with a response) if you can.
- Never say "no comment" — it means "we're guilty" or "we're covering up"; you can always say something. If you're investigating and getting to the bottom of an issue, use it as a message.
- Look at the journalist — NOT the camera — pause before you respond to the question, remain calm, talk slowly, show concern — people will remember the impression that they had of you, not necessarily what you said.
- If you have a responsible eyewitness to offer the journalist, do so ONLY after the eyewitness has been given "on-the-spot" media training and helped with message development.

What is releasable to journalists?

- Information about the accident
- Time, place, any details that do not speculate on the cause of the accident, number of persons involved, departure point and destination, type of equipment involved, purpose of the mission (if unclassified), number of people on board (crew and passengers) and if available, when and what were the circumstances of the last crash at the base

- How many died, where they died, how they died, where the bodies were taken
- Cause of death as confirmed by medical authorities
- How many were injured, where they were taken, CONDITION ONLY AND IF CONFIRMED, say "they were listed in _____ condition," remember that their condition may have changed since your last report
- Do not release information on the nature of injuries (unless permission is granted by injured). If you are granted permission, release the information
- Release name of dead (or those seriously injured) after next-of-kin notification. For dead release: name, rank, title, unit, AFSC, gender, home of record (city and state only), awards and decorations, how long in the military, how many hours of flying time, types of aircraft flown, previous assignments, military PME.
- Don't release home address, marital status, name or number of dependents, age
- If accident off base and if civil authorities identify military victims, ask the journalists to withhold the names until next-of-kin notification
- Release name of non-life threatening injured as soon as possible. For example, release after notification of the deceased's next-of-kin if release of the names of those injured would publicly reveal the names of the dead; otherwise, release the names immediately.
- For injured release: name, rank, unit, home of record (city and state only), awards and decorations, how long in the military, how many hours of flying time, types of aircraft flown, previous assignments, education -- DO NOT RELEASE: home address, age, date of birth, marital status and dependents, race, gender

Granting access to journalists

- Grant access to the scene as soon as possible — if you can't then get them as close to the scene as possible
- If valid safety concerns, inform the journalists of this fact, then arrange for them to take long-range visuals with their cameras
- If bodies are present, cover the bodies or body parts and allow access
- If classified present, cover it and have a Security Forces individual accompany the media and PA, then grant access — if it can't be covered, tell the journalists what the problem is — if the journalist has already taken images of classified, ask for the film or tape and then help him/her replace it, by getting the images he needs for the story
- If an off-base accident, ask local authorities to help — remember, you have no authority off base to constrain the media unless a national security area is declared