

# Media Training Manual



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Giving a good interview is an art form that requires the right amount of messaging and newsworthy information, as well as a polished spokesperson.

Before sitting down with or speaking to a member of the media, it is important to understand the purpose of an interview.

The majority of media interviews present two opportunities. The first is to share information about a new product, service or offering with your key audiences.

The second is to help position you, your team or your company as a credible expert in your space.

Interviews even present an opportunity to respond quickly and effectively to a critical and potentially damaging incident.

For all of these reasons and more, this manual will provide you with an in-depth understanding of how to prepare for interviews with the media and how to make the most out of every interaction.



## Understanding the News Cycle

### Where do stories come from?

Idea generation does not always happen organically in a newsroom. Working with reduced staff, editors and journalists are hard-pressed to constantly produce new, quality content. As a result, they often don't have time to conduct in-depth research and brainstorming for possible stories. They need solid ideas, and fast.

This is where public relations professionals come in, "pitching" journalists targeted, timely story ideas that highlight or feature your organization.

Remember, however, that reporters are on deadline and do not have control over the final product once an interview and story are submitted. This makes a polished, well-prepared spokesperson that much more important.

### What sells a story?

Not all stories are newsworthy to all readers. For this reason, journalists cover "beats," or a specific subject area. Beats can be as specific as New York startups in advertising technology, or as broad as trends in enterprise software technology. It is the PR team's job to ensure a story idea is relevant to a reporter's beat while offering a strong news "hook."

A "hook" is the element of the story that makes it newsworthy. News hooks help differentiate stories, as well as demonstrate why the story matters and why it matters now. Hooks can include fresh data, a unique point-of-view or a high stakes situation.

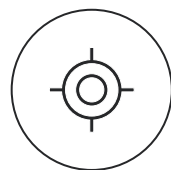
If a story doesn't hit all of these criteria, a journalist is unlikely to do anything with it.

#### Beat

[beat] noun: The specific topic or subject area a reporter covers

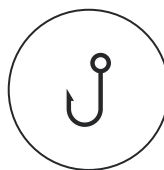
#### Hook

[hook] noun: The part of a specific story that makes it newsworthy and attracts readers



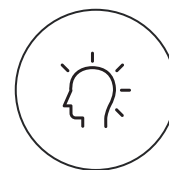
Relevant to  
a Reporter's  
Beat

+



Strong News  
Hook

+



Relevant Thought  
Leader

=



Good Story  
Idea

## Types of Stories



With every interview comes the opportunity to get your company’s story into the media, but talking about your company alone won’t help you make headlines. It’s important to keep in mind the delicate balance between providing a journalist with newsworthy information, data and opinions and providing “self-serving” information about your company or products.

The interview is an opportunity to establish yourself as an expert in the eyes of the journalist, the audience and potentially the industry. The key to establishing yourself as a thought leader in your space is to truly understand why the story you want to share is important.

So what makes a story newsworthy? The table below lists several attributes that can—alone or in combination with each other—make a story newsworthy:

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### Timeliness

**The more recent the story, the more newsworthy**

Your company is launching a new product or service.

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### Prominence

**Stories featuring well-known individuals or public figures**

Your company is partnering with a Fortune 500 company.

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### Proximity

**A story’s closeness or a connection to a specific subset of the audience**

You are expanding into a new, local market.

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### Impact

**Measurable significance, importance or consequence of a story**

You acquire a company or close a new round of funding.

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### Human Interest

**A story that entertains or teaches readers something new**

Your CEO took a nontraditional path to success.



## Types of Interviews

Once a newsworthy story idea has been identified, reporters must often conduct interviews to gather the necessary information. There are several types of interviews to be aware of—all of which require their own approach and preparation. Here are the five most common types of interviews and the most important differences between them.

### Phone

Phone interviews are less formal because you are having a conversation with the reporter, instead of speaking directly to (or in front of) an audience. Remember, however, that you can still be directly quoted on any comments made during the interview. A transcript of the interview may also be published in full, unless you are otherwise notified by the journalist.

When participating in a phone interview, it is critical to have good reception—especially if you are being recorded. To avoid dropped calls and feedback, use a landline instead of a cell phone.

### Television

Television interviews tend to be much shorter in duration. These interviews require an elevated level of preparation. Not only can the journalist see and hear you, but so can the viewers. Everything said on camera is fair game for inclusion in the final segment.

These interviews can be pre-recorded (thus edited) or broadcast live and are conducted primarily in three formats:

- **On location**  
The camera crew will interview you on site, often at your company's offices or at an event location
- **In-studio**  
A producer or reporter will invite you into the studio to sit down for an interview
- **Remote**  
Interviewer will be stationed in a studio; as the interviewee you'll broadcast in from another location

### Radio

Radio interviews can be recorded remotely or in-person. As with television interviews, you are speaking to the reporter as well as directly to the audience. However, since



no one can see you it's important to repeat your company or product name in your answers throughout the interview. If you have a website or event that you're trying to promote, it may even be necessary to spell it out for listeners to search for later.

### Email

Email interviews are the least formal of the group and allow for much more flexibility and the opportunity to carefully craft your responses. They are becoming increasingly common in today's media landscape. While an email interview is the least intensive of the interview formats, it is still important to provide intelligent, conversational responses that stay on message.

### In-Person

In-person interviews are often conducted at trade shows or when journalists request to visit your office. At trade shows, interviews are often scheduled in 30-minute segments at the booth or press room and present an opportunity for you to introduce your company to reporters who cover your industry.

## TYPES OF INTERVIEWS

Medium	Length	Attire	Tone	Notes
Phone	20–30 mins.	Not applicable	Conversational, casual.	Use a landline. Call from a quiet place. Remember that everything is on the record.
Television	10–15 mins. Prep. will take longer.	Important	Composed—being judged on content, delivery and composure.	Keep responses short (10–15 seconds per question). Dress professionally (see page 13). Sit still in your seat and smile.
Radio	10–15 mins.	Less important	Still conversational, but more composed. Audience is listening.	Speak slowly, clearly and succinctly. Pause before responding. Keep responses short (10–15 seconds). If dialing in, see notes above.
Email	20–30 mins. Or as long as needed.	Not applicable	Stay consistent with your personal brand and remember key messages.	The best opportunity to leverage complete control over the message. Check responses for spelling and grammar.
In-Person	20–30 mins. Can be longer.	Important	Conversational.	Arrive five minutes early. Dress professionally. Lean forward and smile when responding. Shake hands when arriving and leaving.

## Research

With an understanding of the different types of stories and interviews, you can craft and deliver key messages that will speak directly to that topic, reporter and readership.

To do so, you must first know the following for every interview opportunity:

### Know your audience

Who is the media outlet's audience? Is it engineers, marketers, restaurant owners or the Chicago business sector? Knowing who will eventually be reading, watching or listening to this interview will help you tailor your messages to explain why this matters to them, allowing you to have the most impact on the audience.

### Know your interviewer

Similar to the audience, having a feel for the temperament and style of your interviewer can go a long way. In addition to having a general understanding of the reporter's beat, what has he or she covered recently? How familiar is he or she with your product, service, industry and most importantly, does he or she have any apparent biases?

### Know your messaging

Solid messaging is pithy, memorable and addresses the issue at hand. Keep it easy to understand, use clear examples and avoid jargon and acronyms, if possible. Walker Sands recommends preparing three key messages for every interview and bridging back to one of those messages with each response. See the section on interview tips to learn more.

The Walker  
Sands Solution:  
The Briefing  
Document

Prior to every interview, Walker Sands will provide you with a briefing document that outlines the key details about the media outlet, its audience and the interviewer, and provide sample questions. This briefing document will help you understand what type of information the reporter is looking to get from his or her conversation with you and provide some key messages for quick reference.





## The Four Types of Interview Questions



All interviews are different, but there are four types of questions you can generally expect to encounter. Be ready to answer all of them.

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### Background

Provide the interviewer with context around your expertise.

“Tell me about your company.”

“How did you get your start in [industry]?”

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### Evidential

Provide specific use cases or examples to support your argument.

“How have [end users] used your product/technology?”

“How many [units or services] have you sold?”

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### Opinion

Sound off on popular, related subjects or news stories.

“What makes your [product or service] different from [competitor]?”

“What is lacking in today’s existing [industry] solutions?”

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### Advisory

Deliver action items to bring your theories and arguments to life.

“What can be done to improve the state of [industry]?”

“How can [end users] integrate your [product/solution] into their businesses?”



## Delivering Key Messages



Once you have determined what your key messages should be, aim for three, and make sure you are delivering them in the right way.

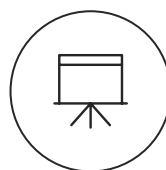
The best messages are relevant, positive, people-focused, and concise. Make sure your messages fit these criteria. Use examples, anecdotes, third-party endorsements or research, figures and visuals to support them.

- **Repeat.**  
Repetition is a way for your message to linger in the minds of the audience. Keep in mind that the shorter messages are, the easier they are to repeat.
- **Emphasize.**  
Remember to place emphasis on the most important part of your message. This can be done with subtle verbal or physical cues, such as pausing or slowing down, speaking slightly louder, or leaning forward.
- **Analogize.**  
Analogies make obtuse messages easier to understand. An effective use of an analogy is an effective way to get your point across.
- **Describe.**  
Use anecdotes, customer testimonials or specific examples wherever possible to add clarity and credibility to your response.



Key Message

+



Analysis

+



Restated  
Question

=



Response

## Mock Interviews

Practice makes perfect and interviews are no exception. The more interviews you do, the easier they will become, but in the meantime practice will help ensure you're prepared to speak with a journalist.

Practice answering some sample questions out loud. Use the checklist below to ensure you are delivering your message in an effective manner:

- Did you miss any key messages?
- Did you get off-message, ramble or go on a tangent?
- Do you overuse filler words? (ums, uhs and ahs)
- Do you have any nervous ticks?

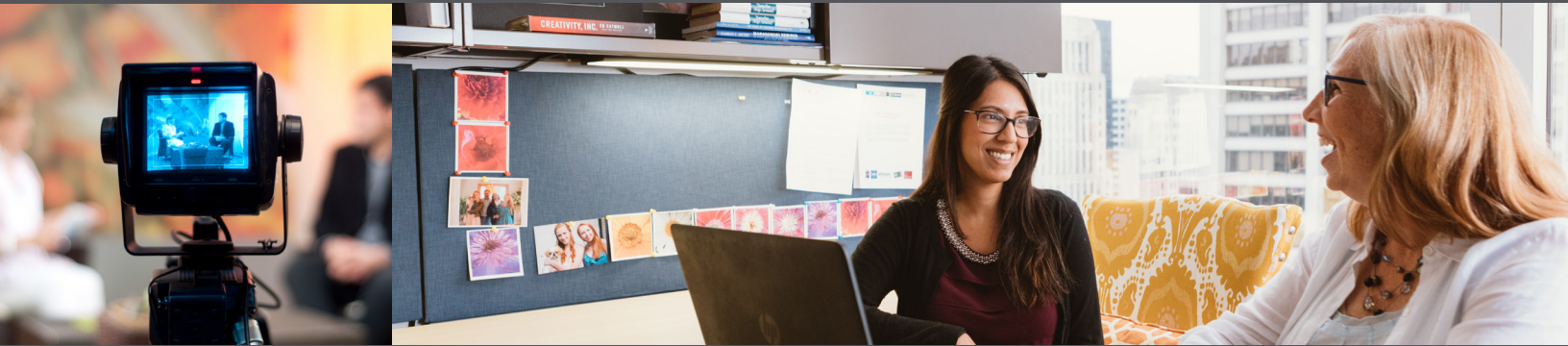


The Walker  
Sands Solution:  
Mock Interviews

If you answered yes to any of the questions above, or would just like some more personalized media coaching, ask your PR team about conducting a mock interview. In a mock interview session, we'll ask the same questions a journalist would, but provide tactical feedback on how best to bridge back to key messages, calm nervous habits and ace the interview.



## Top 10 Interview Tactics



### 01 Insert brand mentions

How many times should you insert the company name or brand? Aim for at least one mention per answer. This increases the chance of your company name appearing in a direct, standalone quote in print, and decreases the chances of your company name getting cut out of sound bites in a broadcast interview.

### 02 Repeat the question

It may sound simple, but it's often overlooked. When a reporter asks you a question, frame your answer using that question. For example, if you are asked why you expanded into a new market, frame your response as: "We wanted to expand into this new market because ..." We call this speaking in sound bites. A reporter may take what you say word for word, and providing context to the question is helpful.

### 03 Choose your words carefully

Never repeat negatives. This is the one exception to repeating the question! Don't risk a negative sound bite by repeating a negative question or statement. For instance, if a reporter asks about recent downsizing, you might answer by talking about a renewed focus on product design. This is called "bridging." Always bridge back to your key messages when possible. This is an effective way to control the narrative of the interview, and thus, the resulting story. Also, think carefully about the words you use when responding to questions. Instead of "turmoil," position it as a "challenge." Instead of a "loss," call it a "shift." Instead of saying "no," say "not yet."

### 04 Be prepared for difficult questions

When asked a difficult, controversial or unfamiliar question, take a moment to gather your thoughts. Even just acknowledging the question ("That's a great question,") will buy you a few seconds to get your thoughts together. If you don't want to or can't answer the question, consider bridging back to a key message instead. For example, say, "I can't speak to that but what I can share is [key message]."

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- 05 Don't make it up
- If you really don't know the answer to a question, don't guess. Explain that you don't know the answer offhand, but you or your PR team will find the information and follow up. If the reporter pushes you and you feel comfortable estimating, make that clear. Use phrases such as, "That's a good question. I'm not sure off hand, but we can try to find out for you..."
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- 06 Provide examples
- Give anecdotes and examples that tell your company or your product's story. Stories help reporters and readers better understand what you're talking about and provide a great way to illustrate the impact your company is making—whether in the industry, with customers or internally.
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- 07 Assume you're always on the record
- There are many distinctions for how reporters get and use the information you give them. Play it safe and assume that everything you say has a chance of making the final story. With that in mind, be careful how you phrase and frame things; remember to err on the side of caution.
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- 08 Engage the reporter
- Remember that this is an interview, not an interrogation. Aim for a conversational tone when speaking with the reporter. Give them time to process your answers, and ask followups like, "Does that answer your question?" When appropriate, ask them questions about their existing knowledge or interest in the space. Remember reporters are people, too.
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- 09 Provide additional comments
- Reporters often conclude an interview by asking if there is anything else you want to add. Never pass on this opportunity. Instead, use it to summarize your three key messages, and provide the journalist with a call to action. Do you want readers, listeners or viewers to visit your website, download your app or start their free trial with you? Mention it to the reporter and it's more likely to get mentioned in the story.
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- 10 Speak with confidence
- You are the expert! Don't let reporters rush you with rapid-fire or off-base questions. Remember, you set the pace of the interview and are in control of the conversation and message.

## Following Up

Once the interview concludes, thank the reporter. A simple thank you can go a long way. If during the interview a journalist asked you for information you didn't have on hand, your PR team will follow up. That followup is also an opportunity to emphasize key messages or offer yourself as a resource for future interview opportunities.

## TV/In-Person Interview Tips

- **Maintain Eye Contact**  
If the reporter is not on screen with you, you will be looking “down the barrel” of a camera lens when answering questions. Keep your eye contact strictly on the camera lens at all times. Do not look at the crew, television screens or down at your lap. As unnatural as it seems, staring down the barrel keeps your eyes from darting around and from conveying a sense of nervousness.
  - **Sit Still**  
If you have a chair that swivels and creaks, remember to sit still. Shifting in your seat or swiveling back and forth can have the same “darting eyes” effect described above. Sit up straight and lean toward the reporter. Body language is as crucial to a successful TV and in-person interview as your answers.
  - **Keep Your Answers Brief**  
Try to keep your answers to 10 – 15 seconds. If you feel the need to take more time to explain a concept, that is fine, but try to avoid answers that are longer than one minute, as you will lose the audience and/or reporter. Keep the tone conversational and natural.
  - **Pause and Pace Yourself**  
Feel free to pause for a second before you start each response. Pausing affords you time to think about what you want to say before you say it.
- Pausing also helps you avoid fillers like “um,” or “ah.” Another way to give yourself a moment to think is to begin your response with “that’s a good question.” Don’t overuse this tactic or you’ll seem disingenuous.
- **Smile and Relax!**  
Remember to smile when speaking! On TV in particular, emotions are conveyed on a one-down scale, in which a neutral expression appears to the audience as a frown. Show your natural smile and avoid nervous habits like clenching your jaw, forming fists with your hands, fidgeting with your tie or jewelry, and shaking your leg when it’s crossed.
  - **Know your cues.**  
Ask how far or close to sit to the microphone if you’re not wearing a pack, then position yourself and don’t move away from it during the interview. Ask where to look at the start of the segment, the camera or reporter, and stay focused there.
  - **Mind the lights, cameras, distractions.**  
If your earpiece falls out during a satellite interview, wait until you finish your response to discreetly position it back in your ear. For on-site interviews, avoid looking at yourself on the TV monitors and getting distracted. And many studios use a “three-point lighting” formation, so be careful not to get overheated.



## Dress Code

For television and in-person interviews, the general dress code guidelines include dressing in simple, solid colors. Try to avoid bright reds, solid whites and “backdrop” blue or greens, which can cause a problem with green screens. Be sure to wear something you feel comfortable sitting in. Go light on the jewelry and moderate on the makeup.

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### What to Wear /Women

- Avoid stripes, any geometric patterns, and high contrasting colors
- No large, “clanky” jewelry
- No miniskirts
- No low-cut or V-neck blouses
- Take caution if wearing a dress. You may need to wear a wireless mic and will need a spot to place the mic pack
- Wear a moderate amount of makeup: matte lipstick, no lip-gloss
- Add volume to your hair and use product to avoid frizz and keep it out of your face

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### What to Wear /Men

- Avoid any geometric patterns: checks, stripes (except for ties), herringbone
- Wear a dark suit and light-colored shirt
- Leave your suit jacket buttoned
- Do not wear a plain white shirt, unless under a suit
- Wear longer socks that stop at the calves
- Socks and belts should match the color of your shoes
- Get a haircut a few days before, if possible
- Comb your hair and use a bit of product to keep it in place





## About Walker Sands

Walker Sands is a public relations and digital marketing agency for business-to-business technology companies. With an integrated approach to creative services, Walker Sands helps clients build brand awareness, enhance credibility and drive new business. Walker Sands is a six-time Inc. 5000 honoree and regular recipient of some of the industry's most prestigious awards from organizations including Entrepreneur, Holmes Report and Hermes Creative. Walker Sands was founded in 2001 and has offices in Chicago, San Francisco and Seattle. To learn more, visit [walkersands.com](http://walkersands.com) or [walkersandsdigital.com](http://walkersandsdigital.com)