

# 10 tips for media interviews

The guidelines below provide a starting point for media interviews. The Communications Department is available as a resource and to be onsite to assist diocesan, parish and school employees prepare for and gain confidence during interviews. Please contact the Communications Department at [comm@gbdioc.org](mailto:comm@gbdioc.org).

1. **It's all "On the record."** Whenever you are with a reporter – whether it is on the phone, greeting them at the door, or making polite conversation – everything you say is considered "on the record." "On the record" means that anything you say or any information you disclose to the reporter may be used, and attributed to you. This is the toughest and most important rule to remember. The only exception to this is when you and the reporter agree to an "off the record" interview, which is rare and not recommended.
2. **Never say "no comment."** It almost always implies guilt. Instead, let the reporter know that you will get back to him or her. And if you can't comment on a story then explain why a comment cannot be made, or direct the reporter to the person who can comment.
3. **Be prepared.** Before the interview, have a good sense of what kind of information the reporter is looking to gather from you. Be proactive and have a couple of key messages or points prepared (not necessarily memorized, but definitely in mind).
4. **Be an active participant.** People often assume that this is the "reporter's interview," but it's not. Rather than just answering the reporter's questions, bring your expertise to the table. The reporter relies on you to raise critical matters so his or her story is accurate. Conversely, be disciplined in what you are saying. Silence during the interview often causes people to rush in and fill the void, which can lead to saying things you shouldn't. Don't be pressured by silence.
5. **Relax.** Some people find interviews stressful, while others handle them with great ease. To minimize the stress, give yourself about 5 to 10 minutes prior to the interview to collect your thoughts and focus on the interview itself. Remember your body language, especially for TV interviews.
6. **Smile and think about your audience.** During the interview, focus on a potential reader/viewer who will receive the report (spouse, friend, parent). Remember that the reporter essentially is a "middleman" who is conveying your information to people within the community.
7. **Talk in plain, simple terms.** Chances are the reporter doesn't know much about the Catholic Church or your type of work, both of which have their own lingo. Speaking in plain terms increases the odds of your message getting through to the reporter and to the readers/viewers/listeners. The best advice is to practice (not memorize) your answers.
8. **Re-answer a question.** Sometimes, interviewees start to answer a question and then realize they are not answering as well as they would like. Feel free to stop yourself and tell the reporter that you are going to start over. Most reporters welcome this because they want and need a clear answer from you. The only time you cannot do this is when the interview is being broadcast live.
9. **Close the deal.** Before saying goodbye, invite the reporter to call you if he or she needs more information or further clarification. Give the reporter your business card.
10. **Corrections.** If the report contains factual errors, get in touch with the reporter immediately so that errors can be corrected on the web site or the next broadcast or print edition. If the story falls short of the angle you had hoped for, you might need to grin and bear it. You have some control over the interview, but not the finished product.