

PRESIDENT MEDIA GUIDE

A GUIDE TO HANDLING THE MEDIA FOR P&C PRESIDENTS



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Every care has been taken to ensure the accuracy of the information contained herein, but no responsibility is taken for any lack of coincidence with any Act, Regulation or rule. These Acts of Parliament, together with the P&C Constitution are the definitive documents in this area.

Why me?

There may be several reasons why a reporter wants to talk to you:

- You're the official spokesperson for an organisation or event.
- A reporter has asked for someone to respond to a specific story.
- In response to an event, the reporter wants a "reaction clip" (a five- to ten-second bite) that offers an emotional response.
- The reporter wants a fresh perspective and an honest point of view. (That's attractive to reporters who are used to media-savvy spokespeople who always feed them the same lines.)²

The information in the following sections will help you learn how to get your message across effectively in an interview.

It is important to remember that just because you are the President of the P&C you do NOT have to give the interview. Often you will be the one responsible for this role; however, you can delegate this role to another member of your P&C at a General Meeting (and give them a copy of the information contained on the following pages). In this way all members will know who the spokesperson is for your P&C, should the media call.

It is equally important to ensure that the message you deliver is representative of the whole P&C and not just your own opinion – so if you need to call a few people and ask their opinion, tell the reporter you will get back to them once you have established group consensus. It is well within your rights to conduct the interview to suit your time frame and their deadlines!

Before the Interview

Some tips to help you prepare for an interview:

2. UNDERSTAND WHY YOU ARE BEING INTERVIEWED. WHEN ASKED FOR AN INTERVIEW, GETTING ANSWERS TO THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS WILL HELP YOU ASSESS THE REQUEST.

These include:

- What is the topic and angle of the interview?
- What was the impetus for the story?
- How will the interview be used - for a news story, a current affairs feature or an entertainment piece?
- Which publication – or TV or radio system – wants to do the interview?
- Who will the interviewer be?
- When and where do they want to do the interview?
- How much time is the reporter requesting for the interview?
- What is the story deadline?
- When will the interview be published or broadcast on air?
- Is anyone else being interviewed for the story?
- What are the characteristics of the media outlet and the reporter?

It is also useful to find out:

- If the media outlet has an apparent point of view on the subject.
- How much the reporter knows about the subject.
- If the reporter or media outlet has done anything on the topic in the

past. Check press clippings.

- How friendly or antagonistic the reporter is.
- What the audience of the news outlet is.

Other questions to ask regarding a radio or TV interview include:

- Will it be a live broadcast?
- Will the interview be conducted in a studio, by phone, or in some other location?
- Will it be by remote, with the interviewer not physically present but asking questions from another site while connected by satellite transmission?
- Is the interview being taped for uncut airing, or is it being taped for excerpting?
- Will the broadcast include call-ins or emails from viewers, listeners, or an on-line audience?
- How long will the broadcast last?
- What is the show's format? A panel? One interviewer and one guest? Two interviewers and one guest? Two guests debating?
- If there are other guests, in what order will they speak?
- Will it be before an audience? How will the audience be selected?
- Can visual props be used?
- Will film clips or videotape inserts be used? If so, will you have an opportunity to review them and prepare comments or responses?

Before the Interview Continued

Other questions for a print interview include:

- In which section of the publication will the article appear?
- Will a photographer accompany the reporter and take pictures?
- Will photos be taken before, during, or after interview?⁷

2. DON'T BE AFRAID TO DO THE INTERVIEW

People often turn down the chance to be interviewed because they're nervous, or afraid they'll say the wrong thing. Instead, think of the interview as a special opportunity for you to convey your message. If perceptions about your P&C, your school, or education in general have been wrong in the past, this is your chance to set the record straight.²

3. KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

Remember, you do have a choice about being interviewed. If you're uncomfortable with the idea, you can say no. You can also discuss options with the reporter: you can ask that only your first name be used, you can ask for anonymity, or you can ask to be interviewed off-camera. If the reporter has called to interview you over the phone and you don't feel prepared to talk right away, ask the reporter when you can call him/her back. But don't back out just because you're intimidated. The only way you'll get to be media-savvy is to practice!

All Media bodies with/in Australia must abide by the Broadcasting Services Act 1992. In Part 9, section 123 (1) it states that all licensees and service providers must develop codes of practice that "are to be applicable to the broadcasting operations of each of those sections of the industry". Section 123 (2) goes on to state: "Codes of practice developed for a section of the broadcasting industry may relate to:...promoting accuracy and fairness in news and current affairs programs; and

- (c) preventing the broadcasting of programs that:
 - (i) simulate news or events in a way that misleads or alarms the audience..."¹⁴

Find out what company the reporter comes from and what their particular Code of Practice is, in order to further empower your choice to do this interview! Some codes of practice are freely available over the internet, others you will need to contact the media body itself for. In essence, they all state the body must strive for factual accuracy at all times, amend errors in a timely manner, have a commitment to impartiality and balance and will protect confidential sources.

Let's now take a look at some other laws that apply to both the media and y

Obligation / requirement	Explanation	Examples of what NOT to say
Prejudice	"noun 1. an unfavourable opinion or feeling formed beforehand or without knowledge, thought, or reason. 2. any preconceived opinion or feeling, favourable or unfavourable. 3. disadvantage resulting from some judgment or action of another. 4. resulting injury or detriment." ³	"We all know what happens when..." "What can you expect? They're both children from..."
Sub judice	"Publishing material that tends to prejudice a fair trial." (p80) "The Latin phrase 'sub judice' literally means 'under or before a judge or court' (NSWLRC 2000:8) and applies to the period during which there are limitations placed on what the media may report about a case. The courts have attempted to balance the competing rights and interests of those involved in court cases and those reporting on them by restricting what may be published about a case while it is before the courts. The restrictions are considered necessary to avoid 'trial by media', where free speech interferes with the usual safeguards of the legal system with dire consequences for the case at hand and for the public confidence in the administration of justice. The practical concern the courts have here is the potential influence such a media trial might have on prospective jurors (and to a lesser degree, on witnesses). The fear is that their judgement (or testimony) might be tainted by media coverage of the case before or during trial..." (p82) "The fact that sub judice material is later proved to be true is no defence". (p91) ⁴	"I know the Treasurer is guilty of stealing because there's money missing from the account!" "Of course the equipment was damaged – we just never had time to fix it." "Although I didn't see it, judging by the way everyone says the driver was swerving all over the road they had to be drunk, so of course they drove through the wall!"

Before the Interview Continued

Obligation / requirement	Explanation	Examples of what NOT to say
Defamation – slander and libel	<p>"Defamation is almost a daily occurrence in our lives. We defame someone when we say or write something to another person that damages someone else's reputation". (p159) "The Macquarie Concise Dictionary, Third edition (1998) defines defamation as 'the wrong of injuring another's reputation without good reason or justification;...slander or libel'. In turn, 'slander' is defined as 'defamation in a transient form, as speech'; and 'libel' as 'defamation by written or printed words, pictures, or in any form other than by spoken words or gestures.'" (p160) .</p> <p>"...The notion of whether defamation is 'justified' or 'with good reason' is not something that is to be decided by the gut feeling of the person doing the defaming. Any such excuse must fall within the defences developed in the courts and parliaments". (p161)</p> <p>Just because you don't name the person does not mean that defamation laws do not apply. Merely providing enough information to identify a person or group will suffice, if they can demonstrate that "people thought it referred to them". (p176)</p> <p>"To establish a case, plaintiffs need to show that the material was published, that it was defamatory (made others ridicule them or think less of them) and that they were identifiable (although not necessarily named). The defamatory meaning of a statement is known as an 'imputation'. The imputation comes from words or images themselves as well as from the total context of the publication". (p180) ⁴</p>	<p>"the following examples of words:</p> <p>sacked, terminated, dismissed, cheated, incompetent, fraud, insolvent, bankrupt, liquidation, convicted, failed, deceived, lied and stole... key topics that are likely to upset people enough to prompt them to sue for defamation...</p> <p>include incompetence, unprofessional behaviour, negligence, misuse of position, misconduct, unethical behaviour, dishonesty, misrepresentation, theft, fraud, criminality, immorality, and stigmas such as mental illness or appearance". (pp172-173). ⁴</p>

Obligation / requirement	Explanation	Examples of what NOT to say
Copyright Act 1968 Commonwealth	Ensure that all information you use from another source whether quoted directly or indirectly, acknowledges the source, especially when writing press releases.	As I have often said, to be or not to be, that is the question.
Equal Opportunity Act, 1984 Western Australia	<p>"The objects of this Act are —</p> <p>(a) to eliminate, so far as is possible, discrimination against persons on the ground of sex, marital status or pregnancy, family responsibility or family status, sexual orientation, race, religious or political conviction, impairment, age or, in certain cases, gender history in the areas of work, accommodation, education, the provision of goods, facilities and services and the activities of clubs;</p> <p>(b) to eliminate, so far as is possible, sexual harassment and racial harassment in the workplace and in educational institutions and sexual harassment and racial harassment related to accommodation;</p> <p>(c) to promote recognition and acceptance within the community of the equality of men and women; and</p> <p>(d) to promote recognition and acceptance within the community of the equality of persons of all races and of all persons regardless of their sexual orientation, religious or political convictions or their impairments or ages."</p> <p>[Section 3 amended by No. 40 of 1988 s. 5; No. 74 of 1992 s. 5; No. 2 of 2000 s. 28; No. 3 of 2002 s. 47.] ⁵</p>	<p>"Boys are renowned for...."</p> <p>"Our older children are all rough so we have tried banning them from using the sand pits and play equipment."</p>
Freedom of Information Act 1992 Western Australia	"An Act to provide for public access to documents, and to enable the public to ensure that personal information in documents is accurate, complete, up to date and not misleading, and for related purposes." ⁶	"No you can't see our Constitution or members register!"

Before the Interview Continued

Obligation / requirement	Explanation	Examples of what NOT to say
Privacy Act 1988 Commonwealth Confidentiality	Ensuring all health, personal, employee, financial and sensitive information is released only to those entitled to receive it. "Confidential information can include documents, ideas, verbal secrets, works of art and objects. It is most commonly information of a sensitive financial, security or private nature...The actual obligation of confidence can arise in a range of situations, including the terms of a contract (written or verbal, express or implied); the employer-employee relationship and associated trade secrets; the professional- client relationship; the transfer of a secret to a third party if the third party knows (or should know) it is confidential; and under legislation as it applies to secret government information, such as defence documents and tax files."(p255) ⁴	"Sure, here's a list of phone numbers for all of our members, staff and families." "Here's some photos of a group of children at our school...Have we got permission forms? What do we need those for?" "Here's a copy of our most recent bank statement."
Criminal Code Act; Compilation Act 1913 Western Australia	It is lawful to publish a fair comment, however "whether the comment is or is not fair is a question of fact. If it is not fair and it is defamatory, the publication is unlawful" ¹⁵	

4. WHAT IS YOUR REASON FOR WANTING TO SPEAK TO THE REPORTER?

Think about the main message you want to convey, and how to weave it into every single answer you give. That way, even if your answers are cut and spliced during the editing process, your message will still come through.

Your main message is the most important information to communicate to your audience. Here are some tips on how to make your main message effective:

- Keep it clear.

It's vital that you're clear on exactly what your message is, and why it's urgent to get across to the public. To identify your core argument, ask yourself: "What do I care most about?" Also ask: "Why should the audience care?"

- Keep it simple.

Above all, your main message must be positive and contain no negativity. It must be concise, and should not contain complexity or hard to follow rationale. Your main message can have several points to it, though it's best to have no more than three that can be said in less than thirty seconds each. This will keep both the interview and the audience focussed on your message. Each point must be easy to understand and clear using simple, straight-forward language and unambiguous statements. Ideally, the messages will connect emotionally with the audience.

- Keep repeating it.

Weaving your message into everything you do takes practice. The key is consistency. Decide on two or three main points and use them – either word for word or paraphrased – in all answers you give, all the news releases you write and all of the emails you send.²

5. BE PREPARED, BUT NOT OVER-REHEARSED

"If possible, get a list ahead of time of the questions you'll be asked. This is common practice for television and radio interviews. It gives you the chance to think of what you want to say before you're asked the questions on-air. Make sure you know your subject inside and out. Write down answers to any questions you think may be asked. Say these answers aloud with a colleague or in front of a mirror to evaluate their effectiveness, but be careful to avoid memorizing statements. Reporters dislike prepared statements, because they sound stiff and unnatural, and if you depend on prepared statements you could be thrown off if the reporter asks you an unexpected question." ²

Interview Confirmation

Sounds obvious, but confirm the date, time, place and anticipated length of the interview. You may also like to ask about the nearest parking facilities and directions once you reach the front door.

Arrival, Location and Pre-Interview

Research shows that the average audience remembers only seven percent of the words you say. Therefore your non-verbal communication – voice, face, clothes, personal charm and credibility – are also important. Following are some tips about appearance and nonverbal communication for television interviews:

- Try to look professional and tidy. Wear solid, medium-tone colours; don't wear bight patterns, browns, stripes or white – they make colour adjustment difficult. Do not wear clothes made from shiny or flashy material as these attract glare.
- Wear over-the-calf socks so your shins won't show when you cross your legs.
- Women should not wear more than their usual amount of make-up and men shouldn't hesitate to ask for

make-up at the studio – it helps control perspiration and glare.

- Keep jewellery simple.
- Shave just before you go to the studio.
- Pull the back of your jacket down and sit on it so you don't look like you're wearing shoulder pads.
- Wear your glasses if you need to, but tilt them downward very slightly to eliminate glare. Don't wear sunglasses.
- Sit up straight and don't rock or swivel your chair.
- Make frequent hand gestures and facial expressions, but make sure they're appropriate to the subject matter.
- Don't rest your elbows on the arms of the chair; you'll find them locked there and you won't be able to make natural gestures.
- Bring hand gestures up to your chest, not at your lap or in front of your face.
- Maintain eye contact with the reporter; looking at the floor, shifting your eyes back and forth, or avoiding eye contact will make you look dishonest.
- Show interest in the program, subject, reporter and interview – convey enthusiasm.
- Restrain from making nervous gestures such as looking at your watch or playing with clothing.^{9,10}

Some other tips include:

- Allow plenty of time for the unexpected (no parking spaces, traffic, bad weather....!)
- Arrive at the media outlet 5 -10 minutes early. Expect to wait!
- If the interview is in your office or home, tidy up. Put away piles of paper and clutter, and ensure there is a contingency plan for all phone calls and interruptions (e.g. answering machine, secretary, assistant, friend).
- If the interview is at your school, ensure you have permission from the Principal to conduct the interview well before the interview is due to start.
- Pre-interviews – some reporters spend up to 30 minutes prior to an interview warming up the subject. Some spend 5 seconds! Take the opportunity to find out what the reporter is looking for and set the tone of the interview. N.B. Even during a pre-interview discussion, you should always operate under the principle that the cameras are always "rolling" and that the microphone is always "hot".
- Ask when a story or article is going to be run.^{1,10}

During the Interview

The following tips will help guide you through your interview:

1. BE POSITIVE AND STAY CALM – NO MATTER HOW TOUGH THE QUESTION APPEARS TO BE!

- Use positive, descriptive word images that people can understand. Try not to use jargon or technical terms that may lead to confusion for the reporter and/or the audience.
- Try not to appear negative or confrontational, even if asked a negative question. A hostile attitude will make it difficult for viewers to take your point seriously and erode your credibility. Instead, state your point again and bridge or link to one of your messages.

Continues on page 11.



During the Interview Continued

Type of Question	Example Question	Explanation	Example Answer
Softball	What's it like to be President of a P&C?	This question gives you a great opportunity to expound all of your messages. Take advantage and answer with great enthusiasm. This is the only type of question where your answer could last for longer than 15-30 seconds. Don't waffle and only stop when you've covered all of your positive points and messages.	This role is both challenging and exciting. I am pleased to be able to be part of a group whose sole intention is to enhance the educational adventures of our children. I am proud to be part of such a united, positive team of parents.....
Hypothetical	Do you think there will be any long term effects on the children as a result of this action?	Never speculate, and don't answer hypothetical questions. Discount the questions and bridge to your message.	I can't see into the future, but I can tell you that we are all committed to ensuring our children's success by....
False Facts and Assumptions	So, the Police are charging one of the students from your school for burning down the library?	Don't repeat the false information by saying "No it wasn't one of our students who burnt down the library." Just correct the record and bridge to a message.	That's not correct. The Police are currently questioning a suspect linked with burning down the library. We are intent on focussing on making plans to restore the library in the quickest....
Leading	It has been reported in both local and state newspapers that crime is up in your area because young teens are bored. Is this why the vandalism took place?	Again, don't repeat the question. Set the record straight and then bridge to a message.	I'm not sure about that, but what I do know is we are actively involved in a community forum planning strategies to overcome vandalism.....

Type of Question	Example Question	Explanation	Example Answer
Forced Choices	Did the accident occur because child fell off the equipment or because they were pushed?	Obviously don't agree if both of the choices are incorrect or the answer is not known. Tell what you can if the incident is still under investigation and then attempt a positive message.	At this stage the accident is still under investigation, so at this time we still don't know the cause. We are constantly working with all members of the school and our children to remind them about safety....
Factual About Bad News	Can you confirm that the helicopter that landed on your school seriously injured 6 students and 3 members of staff?	Don't ever try to hide or gloss over bad news.	Yes, right now several members of our school are undergoing treatment in hospital. The most important point to remember is.... ⁸

Some other bridging phrases or words include:

- "Let me add...."
- "It is important to emphasize..."
- "It is important not to overlook..."
- "What's more important is...."
- "Along those lines, another question I'm often asked is..."
- "That deals with one aspect of a larger issue..."
- "Yes, and in addition to that..."
- "No, let me clarify..."
- "It's a bit too early to talk about that until all the facts are in, but I can tell you..."
- "I'm not sure about that, but what I do know is..."
- "That reminds me of..."
- "Let me emphasize that..."
- "I'm glad you asked me that. People may have that misconception, but the truth is..."⁷

2. TREAT THE INTERVIEWER WITH RESPECT.

Remember that when you speak to a reporter, you're potentially speaking to an audience of hundreds or thousands of people.

Suggest other sources the reporter could interview. Mention anything that you think might be helpful and offer approaches they may not have thought of.

Ask the reporter what they like to be called, and call them by that name. First name basis can be helpful and less stressful for you!

3. IF YOU DON'T KNOW THE ANSWER TO A QUESTION, BE HONEST.

Always tell the truth. If you don't know the answer to a question, say so and offer to get back to the interviewer with the answer later. Make sure you keep that promise though – nothing sours a good

During the Interview Continued

relationship with a reporter faster than keeping him/her waiting for necessary information. You could say “I’m not prepared to discuss that today”, or “It would be inappropriate for me to discuss that at this point”.

4. SPEAK CLEARLY AND FIRMLY.

- Be clear by not burying important points in long answers with too many details. Don’t leave it up to the media to interpret what you mean. They might get it wrong!
- Use statistics, facts, examples, anecdotes, quotes and stories. However, offer the reporter just the facts, and don’t speculate or estimate, even if you’re asked to.
- Don’t feel you have to fill “dead air” – that’s the interviewer’s job. When you’ve answered a question, stop talking.
- People often remember what affects them, what motivates them, and what others’ experiences are. Word pictures, such as “as big as a house” rather than just “big”, are what people recall.

5. REPEAT YOUR MAIN MESSAGE AS MANY TIMES AS POSSIBLE.

Stay on message and return to the three key points frequently during the interview. Relate all questions back to them because your goal is to make sure your message gets across. If that’s the only answer you offer the interviewer, then they will have no choice but to use it.

6. DON’T BE AFRAID TO ASSERT YOURSELF.

If you’re uncomfortable answering a question, just say firmly that you don’t think you are the appropriate person to comment. In order to avoid making a comment, say something like “I’m not prepared to discuss that today”.

Remember that no reporter has the right to bully you into answering a question if you don’t want to.²

Wrapping it Up

- Leave time for any additional questions, but remember, you are still being interviewed until you part company!
- At the end of the interview, recap any commitments to get the reporter additional information and tell them when you can get back to them. If you are not doing a live show, ask when the piece will run or air. If there were no plans to run a story before the interview, ask if the reporter plans to write an interview.



After the Interview

- Evaluate the interview. Focus on the positive aspects and ask yourself “What went well? What could I do differently next time?” Write down your responses to these questions so you can refer to them before the next interview and enhance your next performance.
- File the news clipping or tape from the interview for future reference.
- Follow up on any materials or information you promised at the end of the interview in a timely manner.

Writing Media Releases

The role of a media release is to notify the media of an upcoming event or an important issue. News outlets receive hundreds of releases every day, so it’s important that yours grabs the attention of the editor and the audience, or it will just end up in the shredder!

Some tips for an effective media release include:

- Most releases are cut from the bottom up, so try to ensure that information is presented in decreasing significance. i.e. the least important information is given in the last paragraph. Therefore, the first paragraph should be a brief summary of the whole release and must include WHAT will happen, WHERE it will take place, WHY it is occurring, HOW,

WHEN and to WHOM. This means that if only the first paragraph is printed, you have communicated the whole story.

- Clearly date the media release so that it is obvious the event hasn’t already happened and therefore no longer news worthy. If you are organising an event, fax your media release out a day or two beforehand. This will give the media enough time to some research if needed, and to schedule it into their diaries.
- Keep your release purely factual and as short as possible using short sentences and short paragraphs. Use positive words and phrases that are easy to read and interesting.
- Avoid using superlatives, clichés, generalisations, jargon and acronyms. If using an abbreviation – always spell it out in full initially, then use the abbreviation. Don’t use technical terms without explaining what they mean.
- Always ensure that any dates, facts and figures are completely accurate.
- Ensure your release goes directly to the right people by writing the names of the relevant editors, chiefs-of-staff or journalists at the top of the release before you fax it through.

Tips on Layout

- Follow a consistent writing style and check your spelling.
- The release should be dated at the top right hand side of the page.
- Ensure your media release is only one page in length.
- Leave wide margins at both sides of the paper.
- Space the text using double spacing, and do not use bold, underlined or italic text type. Try to keep paragraphs to one or two sentences at the most, just like newspaper articles are written. This means it is more likely to be used as the release can be used as is, and the newspaper won't have to pay their journalist to spend ages rewriting it.
- Restrict the use of capital letters to proper names of people, organisations and geographical place names.
- Do not use sub-headings.
- Your contact name, address and telephone number (including after hours) should be listed at the very end of the release.



Community Service Announcements

Most local newspapers and radio stations will be happy to promote your cause if you provide them with a community service announcement. This should be about 60 words in length regarding the details of an event you are planning. A contact phone number should be given for any enquiries. Timing is extremely important for these announcements to be created before they can be aired or printed, so send in your announcement at least 2 – 4 weeks prior to your event.

Photo Opportunities

Local newspapers are often on the lookout for a good photo opportunity. If you're planning an event, think of how you can set up an interesting photo. Let the media know by providing details of the photo opportunity at the end of your media release. Make sure you have permission from everyone in the photo to have their photo published. 12,13

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For more information or to book a FREE training session
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