



Agenda

Doctors for America Media Training

Developing a Message

Talking to Reporters

Tips for Television

Tips for Radio

Writing and Placing Op-Eds

Questions



Message Strategy

What is a message strategy?

- It is not a set of talking points or a sound bite
- Combines sound bites, statistical data, research, policy, anecdotes and the articulation of values, beliefs and vision
- Message strategies are organized around a theme

Principles of message development

- CLEAR: 3 or 4 message points
- CONNECT: Always know your audience – Why do they care? / What is the “ooh!” factor?
- COMPELLING: make it interesting
- CONCISE: sound bites
- CONTINUAL: repeat the message (takes 7-12 times to have impact)

Staying on message—bridging techniques

- End answers on message to drive next question in your desired direction
- Bridge to message (**ATM**):
 - Answer question, then
 - Transfer to
 - Message
 - “What the real question is...”

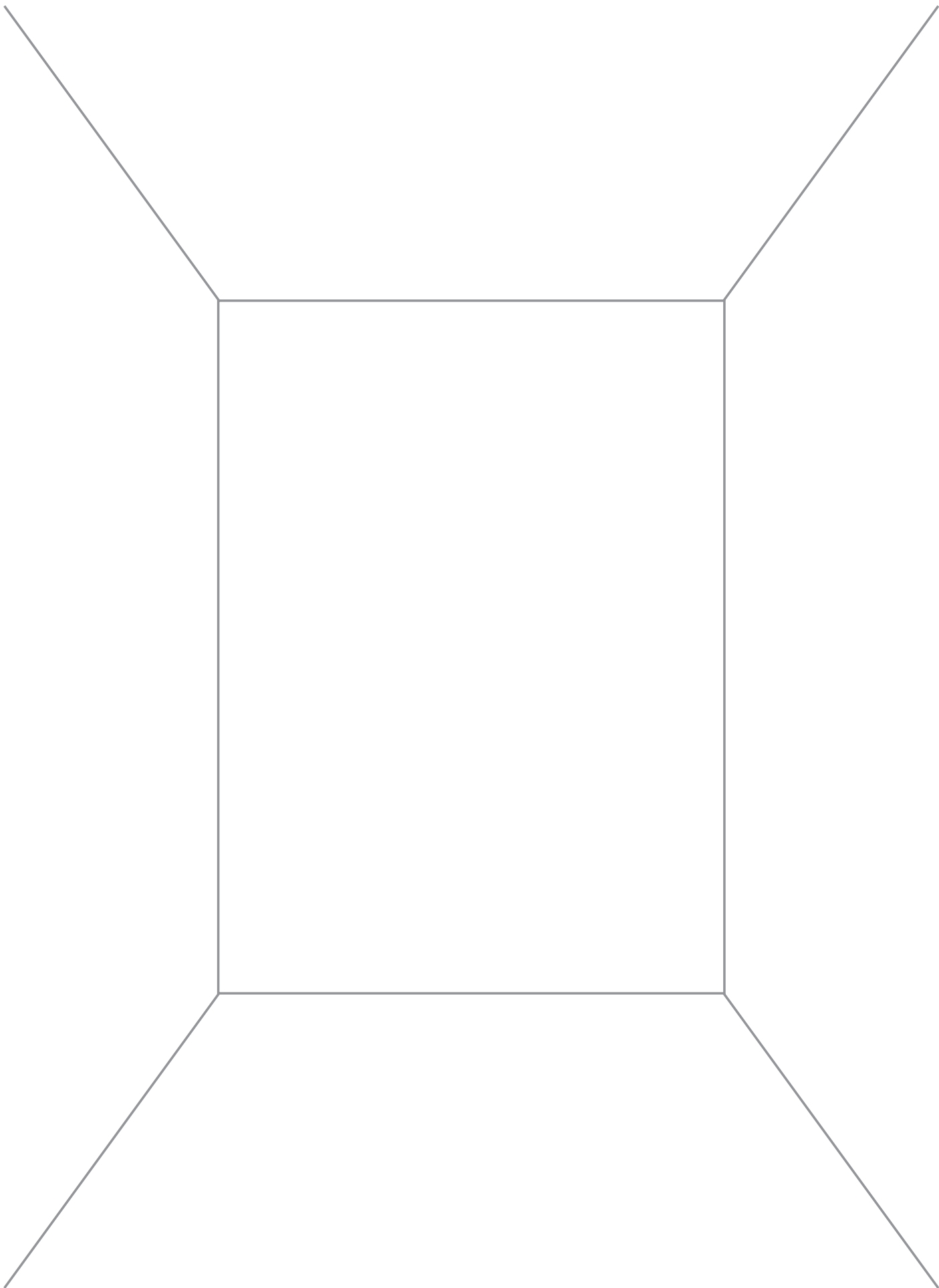
Messages can and should be translated into interviews, presentations, op-eds, press releases, etc.

Message box

The message box is designed this way because messages don't need to be delivered in a specific order. In other words, if you wrote messages in the following way...

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

You may think you always have to start with message number one. This is not true. For some contexts, you may find that message one is the place to start, for others, message three is best. Don't worry about exact wording at this point. Make bullets next to the messages and fill in anecdotes, statistics, phrases, and sound bites that reinforce this message.





Talking to Reporters

When speaking with journalists you will usually have a straightforward, on-the-record conversation. However, there are times when you might want to provide information without attribution or speak off-the-record. It's important to understand the terms and definitions used by journalists and know how to negotiate those terms.

On-the-Record: When you are speaking "on-the-record" everything you say can be quoted and directly attributed to you by name. If you are doing an interview with a journalist, it will be assumed that you are on the record unless you specify otherwise.

On Background: If you prefer to speak without attribution by name, you can ask to go "on background" with a journalist. It's important that when you do so you negotiate the terms for describing you as a source. For example, you might want to be "a housing industry insider" or "a person with knowledge of the situation." Another related term that is less commonly used is "deep background," meaning a journalist can use the information and pursue it, but not attribute it or directly quote it.

Off-the-Record: If you are speaking "off-the-record" with a journalist it should mean that nothing said will be used in their reporting in any way, nor will they pursue anything said in an off-the-record conversation. However, this term has become softer and many journalists will pursue information or use an off-the-record viewpoint to inform a story.

These rules are not interpreted the same by every reporter, so be prudent and explain what you mean when you go "on background" or "off-the-record."

And the most important rule to remember: if you don't want something to become public, don't say it in an interview (no matter the terms).



The Dos and Don'ts of Being a Great Guest on TV

Before you are booked:

DO prepare for the pre-interview. When it comes to national TV, you may be asked for a “pre-interview.” Don’t take this lightly. Be prepared with your message; be energetic, informative and appropriately entertaining. The interview isn’t completely secured until you pass this test!

DO be at the ready. An hour is a lifetime for a producer or booker trying to secure a guest. You need to be accessible and responsive when you know that you might be contacted to do interviews.

What to wear:

DO wear clothing that is neat and comfortable. Wear something that makes you feel good about yourself and doesn’t need any adjusting.

Do wear solid dark colors, beige and light pastels. Men should not wear hats unless it is a sporting event.

Don’t wear small patterns of stripes or checks. American television is still fairly low resolution, and tight patterns will start to jiggle and look like they are going through a Star Trek transporter and be a distraction. Also avoid bright red, which can bleed into the background, and solid white can also be overpowering.

DO apply modest makeup. Don’t go over the top but putting on some mascara, lipstick, and blush is a must for women. Balding men should consider a light powder to cut back on any shine. Many studios will provide make up on site—these are professionals so don’t worry if you think the makeup is more than you will usually wear. It will look good on camera with very few exceptions.

Where to focus:

DO ask where you should look, especially if you are unsure. Looking in the wrong direction, down at the floor, or looking around because you are not sure about where you should be focusing makes you look shifty.

DO ask the producer/tech if they will turn off the monitor if you are doing a live remote interview. It can be distracting and can ruin the interview.

DON’T talk to the camera unless you are asked to do so. Talk to the interviewer, or in a panel situation, to the person you mean to address. Eye contact is important. Darting glances come off as untrustworthy. If you can’t look at a person, pick something to focus on. If you are passionate about your message, just tell it and try to convince the person talking with you. Gestures are fine for emphasis. Don’t be threatening, however.

Know the format:

DO ask if the interview is live or taped. If taped, will the interview be played in entirety, or will a piece of it be put in a “news package”. This should inform how you prepare for and do the interview.

The content:

DO stay focused. If you are asked a question off topic, lead the discussion back on topic. “This particular spill has to do with this particular material with this limited effect.” “I can’t comment on what Mr. Jones has said, but our position is...”

DON’T pretend to know things you don’t know. If the interviewer or another guest tries to ask you about something you are not familiar with, admit it, and move on.

DON’T overload your interview with statistics. Use stats and numbers wisely. For example, if you have written a book about natural methods of preventing diabetes, the fact that 20.8 million Americans are diagnosed with diabetes is important. But if you also mention that 85,000 diabetics have their feet amputated and 12 million people will go blind from it – these statistics will create more of an emotional impact on the host and viewers.

Your delivery:

DO remember that your viewers are not usually lawyers, politicians, or experts in your issue area. You need to speak in plain English, without legalese, shortcuts, or insider language. A good rule of thumb is to call a member of your family with NO interest in the topic and have a conversation with them about it. Have an honest conversation about whether your delivery makes sense or if there were parts that were too wonky.

DON’T speak in a monotone voice. The alteration of your pitch and tone will keep your audience interested. Stay animated. It’s not only what you say, but how you say it that counts!

DO put a smile on your face and stay upbeat. Unless you are talking about war, disease, or something else equally sad, you don’t need to be sad.

DON’T argue unless the format calls for it. Unless you are on a show that thrives on arguing, being combative on a show is not suggested. Your goal as a guest is to win over the audience; something that can be tricky if a question makes you feel angry or combative. If you’ve been ambushed with a nasty question, remain dignified and answer calmly. Losing your temper won’t boost your credibility; plus, it makes you look defensive which is definitely not the best position to be in when trying to promote your message.

After you are done:

DO stay put! When your interview draws to a close and it appears that the camera has stopped focusing on you, don’t stand up and take off your mic! It’s the job of the floor manager to remove the mic for you and give you the all-clear to leave. By leaving prematurely you could run the risk of ruining a perfectly good camera shot and coming off as an unprofessional guest.

DO record and critique your interviews. Watch your interview numerous times and observe the different elements of your performance. Send to friends or colleagues who you know will not be afraid to give you real feedback. How well did you answer the questions? Did your clothes send the right message? What did your body language say about you? Did you seem natural or rehearsed? Did you remember all of your sound bites? Did you interrupt the host? Identify the points you felt were weak and do whatever you can to strengthen them before your next interview.

DO be gracious on and off the air. Remember to thank the host for the interview while you’re still on-air. Make sure to thank the producer as well. It’s also a good practice to send a brief thank you note to the host and the producer. It’s good manners and presents you as a consummate professional. It can also increase your chances of being remembered in the future, when they need to interview an expert on your topic.



From the Horses Mouth

What The Biggest Bookers and Producers Say About Being a Good Guest

What are the best tips you could give to potential TV guests?

“We obviously love guests who are experts in their field - who communicate well and make hard to grasp issues easy to understand, feisty personality but not combative is always a plus.” –MSNBC Daytime

“Guests need to know what they are talking about and have “confidence” when they talk about it. If you are a “guest,” we expect you to be something of an “expert” on the subject... not a shrinking violet. So, come prepared and be energetic. However, if you don’t know the answer to something, don’t pretend otherwise. It usually never works. Just be candid and say, “good question and I don’t know.”

“Guests need to be able to adjust the length of their answers depending on the length of the segment. So, if it’s a short “live,” interview, guest needs to be able to make their point directly, firmly, and succinctly. Even more so if you are on with another guest. Filibusters are always bad... always... even if you feel like the anchor and or/fellow guest is an idiot. However, if you are doing a taped interview, that isn’t as important... since the reporter/producer will cut/edit the tape.” –MSNBC host

“Need good energy and full answers, smile!” –MSNBC Daytime

“Talk in soundbites, short and sweet. Have their thoughts be concise and to the point. Have them be less dry, and more entertaining and compelling. When they are in a debate format, to try to engage with the other side for thoughtful discussion.” –CNN Larry King Live Producer

“In general, we’re looking for smart people who can articulately explain issues to & like a regular person. My best advice to guests is to NOT be nervous. Say something memorable (controversial or pushing the envelope) and DON’T LOOK AT THE MONITOR!!! And unlike other producers, I’m not opposed to hand movements or animated guests.” –CNN Sit Room

- “1) Don’t give long winded answers—be mindful that interview segments are short.
- 2) High ENERGY—so important especially for morning television. Also, make sure you have the appropriate demeanor for the topic you are discussing.
- 3) Give smart and concise answers.
- 4) Be conversational (don’t try to memorize a script)
- 5) Try and establish a personal connection w/ the anchor or correspondent even if you aren’t sitting in the same room. So when you start your first response say “Tom...”
- 6) Use discretion when complaining on-air about an incorrect lead-in. It tends to set a bad tone/flow to

the interview if you correct the anchor during the interview. You can always say something off-camera afterwards.

7) Don't use profanities!!" –CNN American Morning

"...The guest should check their sources before going on TV and should never-ever use other peoples talking points they find in the paper or online. If so, they should say where they read it but never take them and regurgitate them as their own." –CNN Sit Room

"I'd tell people to think of it as a conversation with friends. You've been booked on TV because you have an expertise or perspective that producers think is newsworthy and compelling. So, don't talk down to your audience, but think of it as having a nice chat with a neighbor in the backyard. Use words and sentences you would use when talking to a friend who is another profession, who may not know your field, but is smart nonetheless. Lay it out simply, then build.

"Know what kind of program you've been asked to appear on. There are different ways to express the same point. In TV parlance, we have guests on as; 1) "explainers" ("Dr., how dangerous might this swine flu situation be?") 2) debates, "Hey, John Podesta, should Bush administration officials be prosecuted ... Karl Rove, we'll get to your response in a second") and 3) conversations (usually when the guest is an author, or more of an elder statesman).

"Be aware of what the producers are looking for from you. That doesn't mean change your views on anything, and it also may mean that some guests aren't right for some formats. But try to find out what you've agreed to, so all parties can come away happy with the final product.

"Don't misrepresent yourself or your positions. Be true to yourself. There was a case last year of a guest who claimed to be a conservative on one show, an independent on another, and a libertarian on a third. I don't give a damn what you are, but you must be honest, smart and consistent. I've never booked that guest again.

"Have fun. It's just TV. And you're not watching it ... you're on it. Enjoy it. And unless you are talking about 9/11 or swine flu, you should be happy!" –CNN

"Be concise. Long windedness will derail an interview. Its not always possible to talk in soundbites, but be mindful of the fact that time is limited. Also, stare directly into the camera at all times - this sounds obvious but you'd be surprised at how many ppl look up/around while thinking or look at the monitor to see themselves on the air. Ask to turn the studio monitor off if its a distraction to you." –MSNBC Ed Schultz

"Answers need to be concise - they should be prepared with answers on expected topics. Guests need to have energy." –CNBC

“LOTS of energy. Don’t talk on and on. Get to the point. Talk in sound bites or headlines.”

“Stay away from traditional talking points and back up political opinions with historical evidence or examples.”

“LOTS of energy. Feisty.” –CNN American Morning

“Look in to the camera when responding whenever it’s a remote location from the anchor. If the guest can be on set w/the anchor that always makes for a better interview. Do not wear all white, for men a white shirt is acceptable but jacket and tie should be color; try to avoid green some backdrops are green colorchromed (although a little green in the tie is fine). Keep answers short and concise (but not too short - get to the point without going on and on). When making a point if there’s a good example, feel free to use it. Humor always works - try to inject some during the interview. Request make up whenever its available - in the digital age EVERYTHING shows; be sure to check your hair before you go on air - sometimes it gets overlooked in make up or disheveled after. Use of arm movements without overdoing while making a point can make for good television (see Pat Buchanan for example). Try not to do too much overstepping on the other pov if its a debate. A little of that goes a long way although strategic placement can make for a lively discussion.”—
MSNBC Daytime Booker

What are your biggest pet peeves that might cause you not to book someone again?

“...Guests who interrupt or are rude to each other!” –MSNBC Daytime booker

Slow talker, doesn’t come to the point, doesn’t look in to the camera, makes purposefully personal mean comments (ala Dick Arney’s attack on Joan Walsh in a recent Hardball interview); everyone is turned off by pure meanness; no fluctuation in tone - one note speakers are boring; NEVER EVER say you don’t know - if it’s something that you really don’t know try to change the subject slightly in another direction and head in that direction - heading in to that type of discussion think along the lines of “well, what I will say about that is...” and then make your point that aims as close to possible on the topic. Lots of times the anchor will overlook that the question is not made if the direction the guests heads in is worthy of discussion.
–MSNBC Daytime booker

“Guests who are not cooperative or easy to deal with, guests who can not talk about a variety of issues, guest who is not well versed in the subject they were booked for, guest who is late for the interview.”
–CNN Larry King Live

-
- 1) Guests who abuse car service. If the network sends a car to pick you up—its not a license to take over the car for the rest of your day.
 - 2) People who are ALWAYS late to interviews—time is of the essence and showing up when you are supposed to be on television causes enormous panic.
 - 3) Someone who doesn’t bring added value to the topic they are discussing.
 - 4) Someone who doesn’t actually answer the anchor/correspondent questions and only sticks to talking points.” –CNN American Morning

“I would say my number one pet peeve is when guests talk over each other during a debate. It should be more like a dinner conversation where its okay to disagree but shouting and cutting people off rudely isn’t fun to listen to nor watch.” –CNN Sit Room

“...The guest should never look down at the monitor or adjust their ear piece while on air. They should do all that before the interview starts.” –CNN Sit Room

“If you show up with so little time to spare that you make the control room nervous, you will hurt your chances of being booked again. Also, when disagreeing with another guest, try not to be combative, don’t get personal or be snide. Sarcasm rarely translates to humor when guests are not onset bantering face to face. Also, the faster you respond to an interview request, the better. When a guest/org leaves producers hanging onto hope that you’ll call/email back, that sets their show into flux and will often diminish the likelihood they’d request you again. Also, turn your blackberry off once seated. A lot of guests insist on keeping it on until their hit and then forget to turn it off when the shot begins. That often causes audio interference and will drive producers/directors to have to get in the guest’s ear during the interview, which is distracting.”
–MSNBC Ed Schultz

“Slow talker. Long sentences. Lack of energy. Sticks to talking points. Too partisan (hates the other side just for the sake of hating the other side).

“DO NOT say to the anchor: “Well (anchor’s name), that’s a great question.”

“Avoid using the anchors name too much when talking to them (it is annoying).

“Try to be available for pre-interviews.

“Be nice when dealing with the BOOKER (they are your key to being on TV).” –CNN American Morning



Good Radio Happens Here

Get on the radio

- 1) **Know your shows.** Have a list of all local radio shows – right, left, in between – with their dial numbers, web sites, host names, producer names and phone numbers

- 2) **Listen to your shows.** Spend time each week listening to the various shows. See what topics they cover the most. Get a feel for the host, the callers, the mood, and the topics.

- 3) **Become friends with the hosts.** Grab coffee, send quick emails, send tips, friend on Facebook, add to press lists. Establish a relationship.

- 4) **Find ways to make yourself newsworthy.** If you see in the ADN that gas prices just went up 17 cents in a single week and you were part of the gas-gouging legislation, shoot an email to shows. If new stats come out on the Alaska Dispatch about high school dropout rates in Anchorage and you're part of a job training center for disadvantaged youth, shoot an email to shows about how you have a solution for the problem. Find a way to tie your input to things happening in Anchorage, Alaska, and the World.

Before you go on air

- 1) **Know your show.** Knowing the answers to a few basic questions can be a lifesaver. Always ask: How long is the segment, is it live, will there be callers, what is the specific topic, who are the host and the producers?

- 2) **Know your topic.** Prepare twice as much as you think you should, but have it all in your mind. Many guests think to be prepared, they should have a massive stack of notes, not realizing they fall pretty to the “open book test” phenomenon of not having time to find what they need. Nothing screams bad radio like the endless rustle of papers followed by someone obviously reading.

- 3) **Prepare three important things.** Have three answers mentally prepared before the show.
 - a) A broad description of your topic that you could use as the answer to a potential first question.
 - b) An answer to a potentially tricky question that's likely to come up about your topic.
 - c) A short, one-sentence theme you repeat to get your point across

- 4) **Stay on Message.** Do your homework and craft your message box. Remember, your goal for the interview is to get your information across, no matter what questions are asked. Repetition is key, as is hitting each of your main points.

While on the air

1) Pretend you're at a happy hour or in a diner. Too often, guests are relaxed and loose about their topic before the interview starts, then slip into a faux-NPR voice once things get rolling. A good interview sounds like you ran into the host and accidentally slipped into a fantastic conversation.

2) Stop talking after 30 seconds. This is not the place to filibuster or present everything you want to say about a topic in a single answer. While you may be fascinating, if you talk for more than 30 seconds at a pop, your voice starts to drone in the ears of your listeners and they will tune out.

3) Be a good guest. Do your interviews from a landline, never a cell phone, which can sound scratchy and metallic over the air. Never do an interview on speaker phone. Be on time. Send a follow-up email after the interview, thanking the host and offering to keep the host updated on the topic in the future.

General rules of message (or how to keep listeners intellectually organized)

1) Telegraph reactions. An easy way to keep listeners organized is to simply tell them the reaction they will have to the next thing you say. "I think this next point is particularly interesting..." or "This will make a lot of people angry..."

2) Define everything. Remember that most people listening to the show are not experts in your topic (or they'd be on the show instead of you) and are probably doing something else while they listen to you, so aren't playing 100% attention. Explain everything and don't use acronyms. If you mention a public figure, like a senator, give his or her full name and office. Never refer to pieces of legislation by bill numbers.

3) Use lists but not numbers. "Here are the three things to know about this: one..." or "There are two reasons this is important: one..." That said, do not use many other numbers. Listeners will remember concepts, but not numbers, so saying "thousands of Americans" or "one out of every four of your neighbors" is effective while "4,283 Americans" or "26% of those surveyed" is not.



Top Ten Radio Tips

1. Know the show. How long? Live? Callers? Who is the host/producer/board operator?
2. Know the topic. Prepare twice as much as you think you should!
3. Prepare three important things. Your first answer, a “dodge” answer for a question you’d rather not answer, and a sound bite or joke that you can go to if needed
4. Pretend you’re at happy hour. Unless you are on NPR, act natural and upbeat
5. Telegraph your emotion. Tell them how they should react to something by saying “this makes me so angry/happy/sad”
6. Start with the punch lines. Let them know right off the bat why you’re telling a particular story
7. Define EVERYTHING! Tell back stories and explain all terms you use because not everyone is an expert
8. Call the host by name. Say the host’s name as much as possible
9. Use lists. Such as Top 5 reasons something is bad.
10. Personalize. Take on a personality when doing a show and keep the same personality every time you are on that particular show



Op-Ed Articles: How to Write and Place Them

Op-ed articles are a great way to reshape a public debate and affect policy. Here are some helpful tips for writing a successful op-ed.

Track the news and jump at opportunities. Timing is essential. When an issue is dominating the news – whether it’s a war, a stock market panic or just the latest controversy on a reality television show – that’s what readers want to read and op-ed editors want to publish. Whenever possible, therefore, link your issue explicitly to something happening in the news.

Limit the article to 750 words. Shorter is even better. Some authors insist they need more room to explain their argument. Unfortunately, newspapers have limited space to offer, and editors generally won’t take the time to cut a long article down to size.

Make a single point - well. You cannot solve all of the world’s problems in 750 words. Be satisfied with making a single point clearly and persuasively. If you cannot explain your message in a sentence or two, you’re trying to cover too much.

Put your main point on top. You’re not writing for *Science* or *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*. You have no more than 10 seconds to hook a busy reader, which means you shouldn’t “clear your throat” with a witticism or historical aside. Just get to the point and convince the reader that it’s worth his or her valuable time to continue.

Tell readers why they should care. Put yourself in the place of the busy person looking at your article. At the end of every few paragraphs, ask out loud: “So what? Who cares?” You need to answer these questions. Explain how your suggestions might affect the readers. Appeals to self-interest usually are more effective than abstract punditry.

Offer specific recommendations. An op-ed is not a news story that simply describes a situation; it is your opinion about how to improve matters. In an op-ed article you need to offer recommendations. How exactly should North Carolina safeguard its environment, or the White House change its foreign policy? You’ll need to do more than call for “more research!” or suggest that opposing parties work out their differences.

Showing is better than discussing. You may remember the Pentagon’s overpriced toilet seat that became a symbol of profligate federal spending. You probably don’t recall the total Pentagon budget for that year (or for that matter, for the current year). That’s because we humans remember colorful details better than dry facts. When writing an op-ed article, therefore, look for great examples that will bring your argument to life.

Use short sentences and paragraphs. Look at some op-ed articles and count the number of words per sentence. You’ll probably find the sentences to be quite short. You should use the same style, relying mainly on simple declarative sentences. Cut long paragraphs into two or more shorter ones.

Don't be afraid of the personal voice. Academics often avoid first-person exposition in professional journals, which rarely begin with phrases like “You won't believe what I found when I was working in my lab on Research Drive last month.” When it comes to op-eds, however, it's good to use the personal voice whenever possible.

Avoid jargon. If a technical detail is not essential to your argument, don't use it. When in doubt, leave it out. Simple language doesn't mean simple thinking; it means you are being considerate of readers who lack your expertise and are sitting half-awake at their breakfast table or computer screen.

Use the active voice. Don't write: “It is hoped that [or: One would hope that} the government will . . .” Instead, say “I hope the government will . . .” Active voice is nearly always better than passive voice. It's easier to read, and it leaves no doubt about who is doing the hoping, recommending or other action.

Avoid tedious rebuttals. If you've written your article in response to an earlier piece that made your blood boil, avoid the temptation to prepare a point-by-point rebuttal. It makes you look petty. It's likely that readers didn't see the earlier article and, if they did, they've probably forgotten it. So, just take a deep breath, mention the earlier article once and argue your own case.

Acknowledge the other side. People writing op-ed articles sometimes make the mistake of piling on one reason after another why they're right and their opponents are wrong, if not idiots. They'd probably appear more credible, and almost certainly more humble and appealing, if they took a moment to acknowledge the ways in which their opponents are right. When you see experienced op-ed authors saying “to be sure,” that's what they're doing.

Make your ending a winner. You're probably familiar with the importance of a strong opening paragraph, or “lead,” that hooks readers. But when writing for the op-ed page, it's also important to summarize your argument in a strong final paragraph. That's because many casual readers scan the headline, skim the opening column and then read only the final paragraph and byline. In fact, one trick many columnists use is to conclude with a phrase or thought that they used in the opening, thereby closing the circle.

Relax and have fun. Many authors approach an op-ed article as an exercise in solemnity. Frankly, they'd improve their chances if they'd lighten up, have some fun and entertain the reader a bit. Newspaper editors despair of weighty articles - known in the trade as “thumb suckers” - and delight in an academic writer who chooses examples from “Entertainment Tonight” as well as from Kierkegaard.

How to submit an article. Talk to the relevant people on the press team, preferably before you start writing, to strategize about messaging, timing, and where to submit your piece. You may submit op-eds on your own, particularly if you have a contact at a certain publication, but you must keep press team updated on all of your activities.

Where to submit the article. Here's a wild guess: You're hoping to publish your article in *The New York Times*, with *The Washington Post* and *The Wall Street Journal* as backups. Well, welcome to the club. These and other national publications, such as *Newsweek* and *USA Today*, receive a staggering number of submissions, the overwhelming majority of which are rejected. You have a better shot at regional newspapers and, especially, at local papers, which almost always give preference to writers from the local area. Web sites such as “Slate” and “The Huffington Post” are also gaining in importance.

Compiled using materials from the Op-Ed Project at Duke University.