



How to prepare for a media interview

a guide for disabled
interviewees

September 2020



Introduction

Media Trust is a charity that works in partnership with the media and creative industry to give charities, under-represented communities and young people a stronger voice, through training and access to free resources and matching them with communications volunteers. Find out more at www.mediatrust.org.

We are currently working on a project to increase the representation of disabled people in the media. Disabled people make up 20% of the population, however it's rare to see disabled people featured in media interviews. And when you do, they're almost always only talking about disability issues.

As part of our 'Reframing Disability' initiatives, Media Trust is looking at ways to support experts across a range of different fields, who also happen to be disabled, to take part in media interviews on TV or radio.

About Disability Rights UK



Disability Rights UK is the UK's leading organisation led by, run by, and working for disabled people. We work with Disabled People's Organisations and Government across the UK to influence regional and national change for better rights, benefits, quality of life and economic opportunities for disabled people.

About Furner Communications

FURNER
COMMUNICATIONS

Furner Communications is a communications agency working across the health and social policy sectors with a specialism in disability issues.

Find out more at:

www.furnercommunications.co.uk



What does doing a media interview involve?

Media interviews come in all shapes and sizes. Sometimes people are interviewed on their own or alongside other people with opposing views. Sometimes interviews can be quite long and other times they will be brief and just involve one or two questions. Sometimes they are live; other times they will be pre-recorded and then edited after the interview.



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What journalists are looking for

One of the most important things to have in mind is that most journalists are not out to get you or to catch you out. You are unlikely to be grilled at length or in detail. Journalists appreciate that you are not a politician, celebrity or public figure.

Mostly they are looking to tell a story, using well informed and opinionated people with lived experience to help them do so. They will talk you through what they're looking for, the kinds of questions you will be asked and what format the interview will be in.

That said, some do come with an agenda. Have an awareness of the tone and angle that they are using and make sure you have asked them prior to the interview for details about their approach and their likely questions. If you feel unsure or uneasy, seek advice from a press officer or colleagues.



Journalists are looking to tell a story, using well informed and opinionated people with lived experience to help them do so.

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Questions for journalists

As part of your preparation for an interview, here are some questions that will be useful for you to ask journalists who are interviewing you.

- ▶ Who is calling
- ▶ Where they're calling from (For example, BBC News)
- ▶ What they want to talk about and why they're calling you
- ▶ Whether the interview is live or pre-recorded
- ▶ Whether it is in a studio or elsewhere
- ▶ Who will do the interview
- ▶ Who else, if anyone, is being interviewed with you
- ▶ What is accessibility like at the venue for interview?

This final question opens the door to a discussion about any access needs you have.



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Do you need media training?

Most people who do interviews on a regular basis have had some kind of media training. This tends to involve spending some time in interview-type scenarios, usually in a mock studio with cameras or other equipment. This is to help people get used to the unusual environments interviews take place in, as well as having cameras pointed at you, which can feel intrusive.

The primary stumbling block to doing good interviews is confidence. It's normal to be nervous. Having media training will help with confidence building, as well as developing some interview techniques.

Only you can decide if you need media training although a colleague in your Comms team may suggest it. If you're interested in having media training, there are many different providers, including [Media Trust](#).



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Getting ready for an interview

Whether you think you need media training or not, here are some basic guidelines to get yourself ready for an interview.



- ▶ If you have a press office in your organisation, they are your first port of call and will help you prepare for any interviews.
- ▶ Don't be rushed – you are under no obligation to give an interview on the spot.



- ▶ You don't have to do it off the cuff. Ask for their contact details and say you'll come back to them – let them know if you'd rather communicate via email rather than phone. Make sure you do get back to them as journalists work to tight deadlines. Keeping them updated makes a big difference and they're likely to come to you again.



- ▶ In the meantime, think about the subject matter – or better still, talk to someone. This will help get the juices flowing, and help you identify the main things that you want to get across. These are sometimes known as 'key messages'.



- ▶ Do your research. Have a look at the style of the programme (for example, is it a political show or breakfast television) that is asking you for an interview, and the journalists who work on it.
- ▶ Identify three key points, as you're unlikely to get an opportunity to say much more. Find ways to say them simply and positively.
- ▶ Avoid jargon – most people won't understand it and it can make you sound aloof or disconnected. You may be an expert in your subject but most of the viewers and listeners are not. Keep your language simple, as if you are talking to a 10 or 12 year-old.



- ▶ Avoid yes/no answers to questions. Instead, use them as an introduction to one of your key points. For example:

Question: Do you think we are doing enough to combat climate change?

Instead of just answering 'yes' or 'no', respond with more detail such as:

Answer: Yes, we still have a long way to go but the actions being taken by the United Nations now are setting us well on the right path.

Or

Answer: No, average temperatures continue to increase at a highly concerning rate. The time for more action is now.

- ▶ Don't answer leading or hypothetical questions unless you are sure of your ground. Be polite, be firm, and stand by what you have said.
- ▶ Check their timetable and timeline. When do they need a response from you?

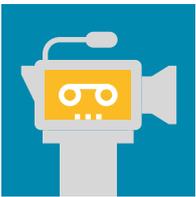


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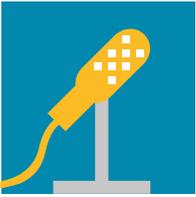


What happens when you go to a TV or radio studio

Media studios are usually busy to the point of being frenetic. If you're not used to them they can feel quite intimidating. There's often a lot of people around, cameras and other equipment everywhere, trip hazards such as cabling, and lights which can make a studio very hot.



It's worth remembering that journalists are also very busy and can come across as quite perfunctory – they are under pressure to deliver on a story and then move on to the next one.



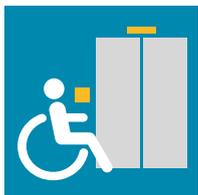
Normally you'll wait in reception and someone will come and take you to where you're being interviewed. For television, they may ask you to allow their make-up staff to apply make-up, as people can appear pale under studio lights. Have an awareness of what you're wearing; viewers may be distracted by an unkempt appearance or unusual clothing. Avoid busy patterns which can 'buzz' on screen. Wearing plain fabric and clothing with simple lines looks professional and polished on screen.



They'll then take you to the studio itself and introduce you to the interviewer, as well as anyone who is being interviewed alongside you. They'll ask you to sit in a particular spot and may also wire you up with a microphone.

They'll explain what is going to happen and the likely timing of the interview. And then... you're ready to go!

Looking after yourself and reasonable adjustments



Most media operations are responsive to requests for reasonable adjustments; and physical access to bigger media outlets' studio space is often pretty good if you are a wheelchair user or use other mobility aids. Regional or smaller media outlets may be less accessible, so do make sure you ask questions about accessibility at any venue they want you to attend.

If you have a mental health condition, you might find it useful to ask for a quiet space for a few minutes prior to an interview; or a preliminary tour of the studio space so you have a sense of what it's like before you have to do your interview.

What's helpful for you, but also to the journalists you're talking to, is to give them a clear idea of what adjustments you need in good time ahead of the interview. Whilst journalists may be busy, they also want the best interview they can get from you. If they know in advance what it is you need, they're more likely to be able to cater for it.

If you feel a remote interview (e.g. through Zoom) would be more accessible for you, it never hurts to ask if this is possible, and depending on the nature of the report it may well be possible.

We know that there are all sorts of adjustments for different people, impairments and circumstances.

If you're not sure what adjustments you might need, you may find it useful to think about adjustments that are made for you in other environments, such as the workplace. Or talk it through with colleagues, friends or family members to help you identify the adjustments that will enable you to take part in an interview.



Don't forget...



Many people are nervous about doing media interviews, particularly if they have no or little experience of them. You may find it helpful to take a work colleague or friend with you for moral support.



Contact us

We hope you've found this guide helpful and informative. We're keen to encourage as many people as possible to get involved in our work and increase the visibility of disabled people in the media.

If you want to know more about the 'Reframing Disability' project, or would like to talk to us about media interview training, please email trainingandevents@mediatrust.org or get in touch via our [online form](#).





**REFRAMING
DISABILITY**

MediaTrust

In partnership with

50:50
THE EQUALITY PROJECT

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