

## Talking with the Media

Effective media relations require the consistent communication of compelling key messages designed to convince the media and their audience of the value of your story. To do this, it is important to constantly steer the conversation toward your key messages. You must drive the conversation to convey the key messages while maintaining a conversational tone that still allows leeway for the media to obtain some insightful information and points of view.

### **Never talk to a reporter unless you are prepared**

If you receive an unexpected request for an interview, you should politely request that it be postponed briefly so that you may be more prepared to answer his or her questions. Some important things to determine:

- The focus of the story the reporter is considering
- The reporter's deadline
- What materials he or she already has (e.g., press kit, fact sheet, etc.)
- A convenient time to resume the interview

### **Speak for yourself, not others**

Avoid becoming the spokesperson on topics for which you are not an expert or the right authority. Let the reporter know that you are not the right person to talk to for that information, and offer to have someone else contact them.

### **Drive the conversation**

First and foremost, remember you have the opportunity to lead the conversation. Converse politely, speaking with the editor, not at him or her, but do not lose control of the interview/situation.

### **Illustrate**

Use real life examples or analogies to get your point across.

### **Satisfy and steer**

Always respond to the question that you are asked, then within your response, use a transitional phrase to make another key point or to redirect the session back to one of your key messages. Satisfy the editor's question and steer back to the key points you really want them to take away from the interview. Some steering bridges include:

- "First, let me say..."
- "What's more important is..."
- "What's really important to remember is..."
- "To the contrary..."
- "I could see how you might draw that conclusion, but the fact is..."
- "That debate underscores the need for..."
- "The bottom line is..."
- "The key thing to remember is..."
- "I can't speculate on that but what I can tell you is..."
- "And that is just a reaffirmation of..."
- "I'm not the right person to answer that question, but I can refer you to the expert. What I can tell you is..."

**Use a conversational delivery**

While key messages offer you a road map and help steer you down the right road, it's okay to drive on the shoulder. In other words, don't be rigid when talking with editors. Be casually direct and flexible with the flow of questions and conversation while always steering your answers back to your key messages.

**Be honest**

Always be honest and answer the editor's questions to the best of your ability. If you do not know the answer to a question, don't guess. Let the reporter know you will follow up with him or her.

**Be confident**

When talking with an editor, confidence is a key component. Believe in your message.

**Exude passion**

Have passion in what you are promoting. Passion is contagious.

**Be timely**

When an editor calls you, assume he or she is on deadline. Get the editor what is needed (within your guidelines). If you don't return the editor's call, the story may still be written, but without your input it could be lost all together. Return your calls in a timely manner.

**Don't talk 'off the record'**

Never assume anything is "off the record" when talking with an editor. Assume an editor is ALWAYS on the job.

**Use the reporter's first name**

This makes your conversation more personal and helps lower tension in your interaction with the press.

**Watch your body language**

We all use body language in normal conversation to make our points and involve our listeners. Don't let nerves or the formality of an interview/presentation prevent you from using the same technique. Some specific body language tips include:

- Don't be rigid; relax and speak in a normal, conversational voice.
- Remember to smile as it will help the conversation stay more personal and can ease tension. Even during a telephone interview, an editor can "hear" you smiling in your voice.
- Aim for good posture that displays your confidence, and maintain eye contact with whom you are speaking.
- Lean forward slightly when engaging a reporter, or when making a particularly important point.
- In the event of a hostile or challenging question, physically take a few steps toward the questioner. It shows your confidence and control over the situation.
- Be energetic. If your answer style tends to be low key, you will need to make an extra effort to be more animated.

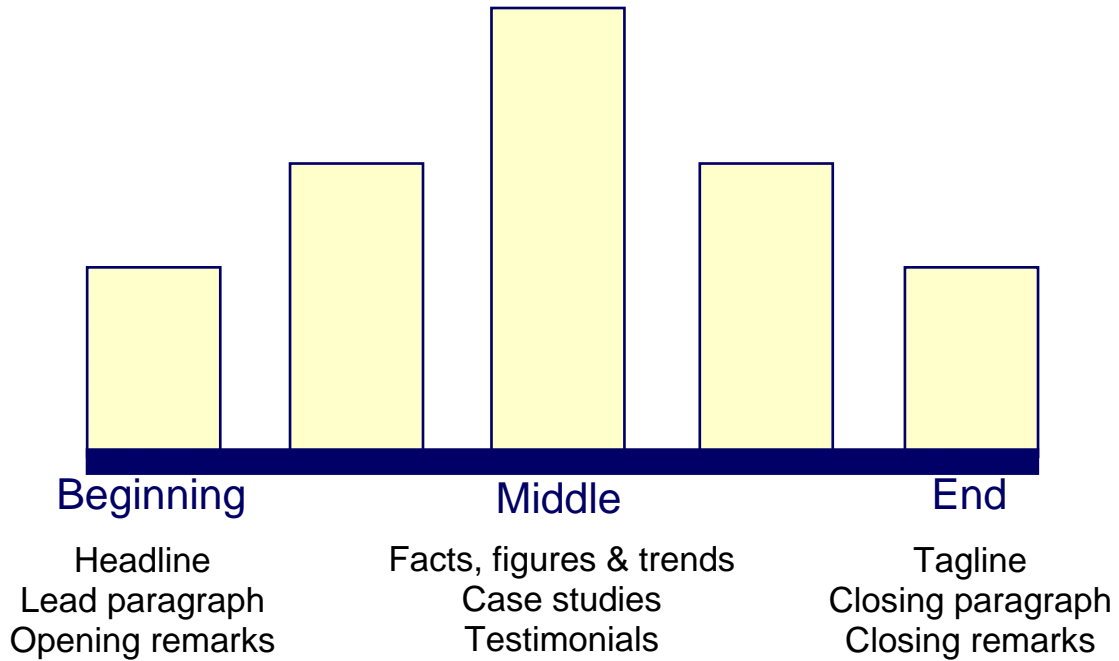
**Know your key messages**

Regardless of the amount of knowledge you may possess about Family & Consumer Sciences, it is important to know the most powerful messages and use them when communicating with the media. Loading up the key messages with too much detail may water down the real story the editor will hear and write.

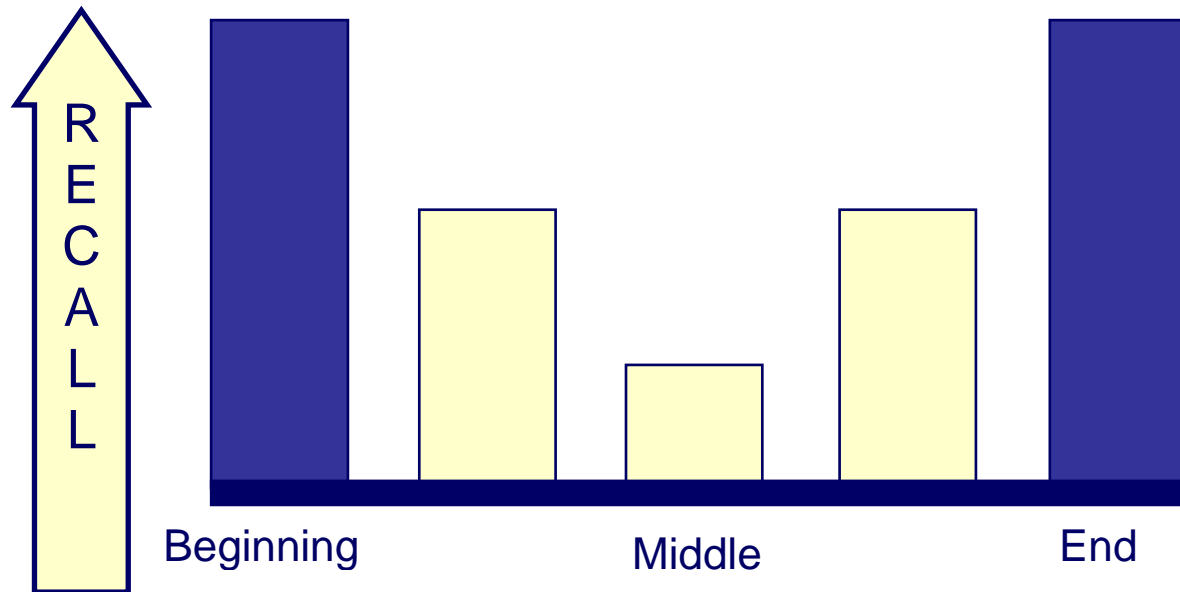
**Front-load your message**

The most effective way to be sure your key messages are delivered is to mention them at the front of your statement. Summarize your key messages as early in the interview as possible by telling the reporter about your concept, who it is for, and what the key benefits are. Once you have stated your key messages, it is okay and even important to once again work them in for added emphasis.

**Incorrect way to build your message**



### Correct way to build your message



#### **Think of your message as a concept**

You want to deliver your message in a conversational manner. To do this, think of your message as a concept that needs to be conveyed and deliver it in your own words. You don't want the editor to think you have memorized the same answer for every question.

#### **Speak in plain English**

You may be an expert, but you must assume you are speaking to a general audience. If you must use technical jargon, clarify by giving definitions. If you are unsure, feel free to ask the interviewer if they understand your answer. Their response will often help you determine their level of expertise so you can avoid "talking down" to someone or going over their head – either of which may alienate the interviewer.

#### **Be to the point**

Keep responses to questions brief and to the point. Say your message in a few seconds, and then stop. Don't ramble on. The more you talk, the more you obscure your message and the more likely you are to say something you will regret. Silence is safety.