



# PRE-INTERVIEW PREP SHEET

You can't wing this call.

The producer needs to know you're prepared and can deliver your responses in a clear, succinct, powerful way.

## THE PREP

### Do your homework

- What has the outlet covered lately?
- Who is their target audience? (The subject matter and ads will give you an idea.)
- What is their take on the topic in which you're expert?
- What tone do they take? Do they lean more conservative, more edgy? Are they young and informal, or more buttoned up?
- What do they want to talk to you about? You can ask for a list of questions, and you may or may not get them. Chances are good they will send them if they're initiating the call. If they're responding to your pitch, then you already know what they want to discuss.

### Draft your content and angle

The producer/editor is either responding to a pitch you sent, or they reached out to you first. Either way, you want to spend some time thinking about your take on the topic, and your responses, in advance. You're not going to read to her over the phone. But you want to be sure you feel solidly prepared.

Write out your responses the following questions, and you'll have a very good grasp of your content and be ready.

### 1. Why now?

- What's the context for this piece? What's the big picture?
- What's being said in the media and online about this topic right now?
- What makes this a timely issue? What's the hook?
- Why is this a hot topic right now?

## **2. Why You?**

- Why are you the perfect person to address the issue?
- What about your background speaks to this topic or why is it squarely in your wheelhouse?
- Do you have a personal connection to the topic, perhaps a story or anecdote you can share about why it matters to you? Maybe a lesson you learned?

## **3. What's often misunderstood about this issue?**

- What do most people think or assume about this topic, and how are you going to shift, reframe, or challenge this way of thinking?
- How do most people get it wrong, and how will you set them straight?
- What key issue tends to be glossed over, underestimated, or missed altogether that you can shed light on?
- What fresh take you can you introduce to the discussion?

## **4. What are the takeaways?**

- What do you think people should know, think, or do in light of this issue?
- What are some steps we can take?
- Why should we do this or that thing you advise?

## **5. What objections might the viewer/reader have?**

- Why might someone initially disagree with or object to your advice?
- What fears or concerns might your advice trigger, and how do you assuage them?

## **6. What research, facts, stats, or other information can you share?**

- Maybe there's been a recent study, or some big story made headlines in major newspapers or magazines.
- Have you conducted a survey, formal or informal, that might lend some insight to the discussion?
- Do some searching online and present a few sources and resources for your information.

You see what you just did? You have just started to outline and flesh out the segment. You're thinking like an editor or producer now!

## **Remember that this call is on the record**

Journalists are curious people; we ask lots of questions. And if you say a thing, we can't unhear it. Be mindful of that. You might want to tell them you're going to use pseudonyms for private clients if you're using them as an example. Some editors will want to fact check your examples, so be prepared for that, and obviously, discuss what is and isn't possible as far as that is concerned.

If you do slip and say something you shouldn't have (it happens), you can ask if the editor would keep that point off the record as a courtesy. But don't rely on this as a tactic.

## THE CALL

Expect the pre-interview to take about 15–20 mins. Here are some techniques that will help you make a stellar impression.

### Master the soundbite

Think of the soundbite as the essential oil of your expertise: Minimal, but potent. The strongest, most essential version of what you have to say.

It is your job to sum up your ideas, opinions, and takeaways in digestible bites. You have just a few minutes to make that interviewer either lean in or space out.

These phrases signal to the producer that it's time to lean in:

- "The one thing I know for sure is..."
- "Look. This is how everyone gets it wrong."
- "This is one of the biggest misconceptions about X that I've heard."
- "There is only one key issue standing between you and XYZ."
- "One of the most important things you must do to (insert objective) is this."

This not only makes it easier for the producer to find what they're looking for (rather than wade through long-winded responses), but it shows command and authority of your topic. If you can say it simply, then you know it cold.

### Demonstrate mastery

The reason that producer found you or is talking to you now is because she believes you have a handle on something valuable to her viewers. Reinforce this by giving examples of how and where you've seen this in your work, your practice, your career. The producer isn't out there doing what you do; she wants to hear how your ideas play out in real life.

These phrases set you up to demonstrate mastery:

- **"In my 20 years doing X, one of the biggest issues that has come up over and over again is Y."**
- **"You'd be shocked at how many people tell me X."**
- **"Let me give you an example of exactly what I'm talking about." (And then share a short anecdote that pays off your point.)**
- **"I can't tell you how many times I've heard this. And here's what I always say."**
- **"I recently gave a talk at X, an event for XYZ, and one of the points I made was about just this. I told them that ...."**
- **"Of all my posts, one of the most read is a piece I did on X, which seems to come into play here. And the point is this."**

## Don't confuse giving with pleasing

The opportunity to support and contribute in the media is an act of giving—it must come from that place in order to have true value. No strings attached. You have to want to give it because it's what you believe in it and stand by it, not because it's what they asked for.

Producers want to get the sense they're catching you in the moment of your genius, in the midst of doing what you do. That lends authenticity and authority. So be wary of promoting goods or services on this call. Now is not the time to do it. Unless, of course, she asks about it.

### Practice

OK, now do it! It's time to run your lines. A few things to remember:

- **Give complete, well-thought-out responses.** One-word answers won't do, but you don't want to yammer on. She'll be asking open-ended questions to see how you'll respond. Be thoughtful, clear, and concise.
- **Don't use super technical terms to impress the producer.** You won't. People who speak in jargon exclusively or talk over people's heads are not a good fit for TV. If you do need to use a technical term, be sure to define it.
- **Stay on point.** Beware of tangents! The producer wants to make sure you can stay on topic and not go down a rabbit hole where the anchor can't follow you.
- **Watch your pacing.** Speaking too quickly connotes nervousness, and too slow is also deadly because time is of the essence on TV.
- **Eliminate the vocal pauses.** Watch your "um"s and "uh"s, which are very distracting on air. Record yourself and become aware of how often you use these vocal pauses. Train yourself out them by simply pausing, in silence, instead of filling that pause with sound.
- **Don't read to the producer.** This goes without saying. You took the time to draft your responses so you could get your thoughts straight. But never read to a producer. Instead, create a short list of bullet points and use them to prompt you.
- **Treat it like a real conversation.** Don't filibuster; remember to hand the ball back to the interviewer.
- **Let your points breathe.** You don't need to fill all the space with words. Let the other person take in what you're saying, take notes, ask questions.
- **Relax.** Easier said than done, we know! But the more you sound like yourself, the better you'll be and the more comfortable she'll be with booking you for the segment.