

Meet the Press on Common Ground:

Media Tips, Tricks and Traps for Romance Authors

Dos and Don'ts of Interviews

According to the *Book of Lists*, fear of public speaking ranks ahead of death, flying and loneliness. There is no more public form of speaking than an interview with the media. It's OK to be nervous. Generally, you will find that once the interview begins, you will relax and become more conversational, particularly if you are well prepared.

Differences exist between mediums, i.e. television, print and online, but in general these interview tips work across the board.

Basic Tips – Don'ts

- ***Don't say "no comment."*** This response is often interpreted as an admission of guilt. If you can't comment, explain why.
- ***Don't repeat offensive phrases or words contained in a question you don't like.*** If you feel uncomfortable about a question or phrase used in a question, don't repeat it in your answer. Examples:
 - *"I am not a crook."* – Richard Nixon, addressing a group of 400 Associated Press managing editors during the height of the Watergate scandal, November 18, 1973.
 - Question: "Is it true that author X's books are salacious and degrading to women?"
 - Wrong Answer: "No, I wouldn't say that X's books are salacious and degrading to women."
- ***Don't use jargon.*** Remember that you are dealing with reporters who cover many topics. They are not specialists but generalists, and they communicate to a diverse audience. Use layman's language and think in terms of talking to a 17-year-old.
- ***Don't throw anyone under the bus.*** Never disparage an author, publisher or retailer in a public forum.
- ***Don't divulge information that may damage your reputation.*** A reporter has no inherent right to publish information that is not in the public's interest or may be harmful to you or your business.
- ***Never speculate.*** Speculating on what might happen is a sure formula for disaster. Always deal in fact when you are being interviewed.

- ***Never comment on rumors.*** Base your answers and comments on what you do know rather than dignify gossip.
- ***Don't stretch the truth.*** Your purpose in meeting with a reporter is to communicate information that will present you in a favorable light. By being less than truthful, your credibility is jeopardized. Don't stretch the truth—not even just a little.
- ***Don't confide.*** There is no such thing as a statement made “off the record.” Often these casual remarks are used without attribution. If you don't want information used in a story, don't give it to the reporter. And remember, everything you say—even casually—is fair game.

Basic Tip – Dos

- ***Pause after each question.*** Remember, you can take as much time as you want before answering the next question. Even if you already know the answer, a pause puts you at ease and gives your message more authority.
- ***Adopt a conversational style of speaking that is quotable.*** Think of the audience as a couple of people sitting in their living room. Talk to them. Frame your answers to their point of view.
- ***Use anecdotes or analogies.*** Before the interview begins, think of interesting stories from your books or career that will help explain your industry to the reporter.
- ***Maintain control.*** No matter how hostile or unfair the reporter may be, you will always lose if you fight with a reporter.
- ***Stay alert.*** Listen and look attentive, even if you're not speaking. If you appear to be bored, the lens might focus on your disinterest, which could then be communicated to your audience.
- ***Take time to answer each question fully and correctly.*** Learn to answer questions succinctly and directly. Also, ask that a question be repeated if it wasn't clear or you are unsure about what information is being sought.
- ***Take the initiative.*** A reporter may know nothing about publishing. Open the interview by saying, in a non-patronizing way: “I don't know how much you know about my book, etc. Let me take a few minutes to tell you.”
- ***Prepare for tough questions.*** Be on the look out for verbal traps. Keep your composure, no matter how trying the situation. Never let a reporter put words in your mouth. If you don't like the way a question is worded, don't use it in your response—even as a denial. Instead, rephrase it in a positive way.

How to Be Quotable

An interview presents you with an opportunity to take your case to the public, whether you are appearing in print or on television, participating in a talk show or being interviewed on the spot of a fast-breaking news story. Success depends on two factors:

- Content (what you have to say) and
- Style (the way you say it).

In the best of cases, content and style work together; you provide factual information that is accurately transmitted through the media. In the worst of cases, the style prevents the content from being understood, or the content is not stated in a way that generates understanding and interest in your book or the genre.

The Keys

Overall, there are three main keys to success that must be adhered to for your interview to be a successful one. You must:

- Prepare well.
- Think before you speak.
- Ensure that you get your messages across.

A Quick Formula for Success: SECS

Practice the SECS formula for responding to tough questions:

- **Statement:** Place the most important information first.
- **Evidence:** Back it up with examples.
- **Conclusion:** Rephrase the statement in a conclusion.
- **Stop Talking:** Don't let the reporter get you to say too much or stray from your message points.

SECS Message Framework

Statement

Evidence

Evidence

Evidence

Conclusion

Stop talking

Anticipate difficult questions

What are the three most controversial or negative questions the reporter could ask, and how would you respond?

1. _____

Response: _____

2. _____

Response: _____

3. _____

Response: _____

What other questions do you anticipate?

1. _____

Response: _____

2. _____

Response: _____

3. _____

Response: _____
