**DOS, DON'TS AND NEVERS**

**DO ...**
- prepare before an interview
- return calls promptly
- know what you want to say
- stay on the record
- be patient and polite
- remember that silence is a reporter's problem – not yours

"When a reporter sits down at the typewriter, he's nobody's friend."

Theodore H. White  
U.S. historian, author

**DON'T ...**
- let a reporter put words in your mouth
- speculate
- talk off the record
- use foul language, make off-color jokes or other offensive remarks
- ask to see a copy of the story before it's printed

**NEVER, NEVER, NEVER ...**
- lie to a reporter
- say "no comment"
- lose your cool or argue with a reporter (you won't win)
TAKE SOME STEPS BEFORE YOU TALK

Buy yourself some time
- It’s important to respond to reporters promptly, but you don’t have to give an interview the minute a reporter calls. Tell reporter you’ll need to call back shortly.

But before you hang up, find out:
- the reporter’s name, affiliation and phone number
- what information he or she is seeking (ask generally – don’t ask for the reporter’s questions in advance)
- who else the reporter is interviewing
- the reporter’s deadline

Call your public information office to discuss the interview (do this as soon as you’ve heard from the reporter).

If you get a voice mail or e-mail from a reporter, call your PIO right away. News doesn’t wait, and delays may mean your side isn’t heard.

Develop your message – and jot it down
- What’s the take-home message you want to deliver?
- The two or three key points you’d like to make in support of that message? Write those down, too.
- Make these points throughout the interview.

Brainstorm questions you wouldn’t want to answer
- Figure out what your answer will be.
- Jot it down to help you remember.

"The reporter is the daily prisoner of clocked facts . . . On all working days, he is expected to do his best in one swift swipe at each story."

Jim Bishop, novelist, journalist
A Bishop’s Confession, 1981

DELIVER A BETTER INTERVIEW

- Have a witness present (your public information officer)

- Set ground rules at the beginning (usually done by your PIO)
  - Is the interview for attribution (what you say will be attributed to you)?
  - Is the interview on background (you may be quoted, but identified only as an "official")?
  - Don’t talk “off the record.”

- Make your key points early. Bridge back to them through the interview.

- Use simple language – aim for an intelligent 12-year-old.

- Keep statistics simple, too. Use numbers people can relate to. Instead of saying “4,000 out of every 10,000,” for example, say “four out of 10.”

- Use analogies or personal stories that bring your point to life.

- Be patient – if the reporter doesn’t seem to “get it” quickly.

- Listen carefully. If a reporter tries to put words in your mouth, say, “That’s not what I said.” Then provide the correct information.

- Don’t speculate If you don’t know the answer, say so. But offer to find out (and follow up).

- If you think you’ve goofed up, say so, and start over.

- If you don’t want to answer a question, don’t say “no comment.” That just makes you look guilty, no matter what you’re talking about.

- Offer to be available if the reporter has additional questions (and let the reporter know how long you can be reached).