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Media Training Essentials

Speaking to the media is not the same as speaking to a friend, a customer, or a room full of supporters. When you talk to a reporter, you are not really talking to that one person. You are talking through that person to everyone who will read, watch, or hear the story later — people you will never meet, who will hear only a few seconds or a few lines of what you said, taken out of a much longer conversation. Media Training Essentials teaches you how to prepare for that reality so your real message survives the trip from your mouth to the headline.

This course helps anyone who might be asked to speak in public on behalf of a business, a nonprofit, a school, a ministry, a team, or themselves. That includes owners, managers, front-line staff who get handed a microphone after an incident, board members, volunteers, and creators who suddenly find a camera pointed at them. You do not need to be famous to need this. A local reporter covering a road closure, a podcaster asking about your work, or a phone recording at a community event can reach more people than a packed hall. If your words could be quoted, you need a plan for your words.

It matters because an interview is one of the few moments where you do not control the final product. You do not write the headline. You do not choose which ten seconds air. You do not decide what photo runs beside your quote. What you do control is preparation: knowing your message before you arrive, answering in a way that is clear and quotable, staying calm when a question is unfair or confusing, and knowing what not to say. Good media training does not make you sound rehearsed or fake. It makes you sound like yourself on your clearest day — honest, brief, and hard to misunderstand.

A note on honesty, because it sits under everything in this course. Media training is not training to trick, dodge, or deceive. Reporters and audiences can tell, and the damage from a caught dodge lasts far longer than the discomfort of a straight answer. The skills here are about clarity under pressure: telling the truth in a form people can actually hear, correcting errors without starting a fight, and protecting private or legally sensitive information by saying plainly what you can and cannot share, and why. That is the standard employers expect, and it is the standard this course teaches.

What You Will Learn

- How an interview really works — who controls what, how quotes are chosen, and why preparation matters more than personality.
- How to build a small set of clear, true messages with proof behind them that you can return to in any interview.
- How to answer the question you were asked and still bridge to what the audience needs to hear, without sounding evasive.
- How to handle hard, hostile, mistaken, and surprise questions while staying calm and credible.
- How body language, voice, clothing, and setting shape whether people believe your words.

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- How to prepare before an interview, stay steady during it, and follow up well afterward.
- How to handle live, recorded, phone, video, print, and social-media interviews differently.
- What to do in the first hour of a crisis interview, when facts are incomplete and pressure is highest.

Lesson 1 — What an Interview Really Is: You Are Speaking Through, Not To

Most people walk into an interview thinking it is a conversation. It is not. A conversation is two people exchanging information for each other. An interview is a reporter gathering material to build a story for an audience. The reporter will take notes or a recording, leave, and then select, shorten, and arrange your words alongside other people's words, images, and their own narration. Understanding that difference changes everything about how you prepare and how you speak.

Three facts follow from this. First, brevity is not rudeness — it is respect for how the story will be made. A television or radio segment may use eight to fifteen seconds of you. An online article may use one or two sentences. If your answer runs for three minutes, someone else chooses which fragment survives, and it may not be the fragment you would have chosen. If you give a clear twenty-second answer, you have largely chosen it yourself. Second, everything is quotable. There is no reliable "off the record" unless you and the reporter have explicitly agreed to it before you speak, and even then misunderstandings happen. The safe rule for beginners is simple: do not say anything in the presence of a reporter, a camera, or a microphone that you would be upset to see quoted with your name on it. Third, the reporter is not your enemy and not your friend. A good reporter is a professional with a job: to get accurate, interesting material on a deadline. Treat them with respect, help them get facts right, and do not expect them to protect you from your own words.

It also helps to know the main interview types, because each one changes your risk. A recorded interview that will be edited gives you a small safety net — a stumble may be cut — but you should never count on it. A live interview has no net at all; what you say is heard as you say it, so preparation and pauses matter even more. A print or online interview is often longer and more detailed, and your exact wording matters because it will appear in text. A phone interview feels casual and is therefore dangerous; people relax, ramble, and forget they are being quoted. An ambush or doorstep interview — a reporter appearing without an appointment — is designed to catch you unprepared, and the correct response is almost always a polite pause, not an instant answer. Lesson 5 gives you a system for each type.

Finally, know your role before you know your lines. Are you the decision-maker, the expert, the witness, or the helper? Speak only from the role you actually hold. A witness describes what they saw. An expert explains how something works. A spokesperson states what an organization has decided and why. Trouble starts when people drift outside their role — a witness guessing at causes, a helper promising decisions they cannot make. Naming your role in your own head before the interview keeps your answers inside ground you can honestly

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defend.

The Steps

1. Before any interview, write down who the real audience is — not the reporter, but the people who will read, watch, or hear the story.

2. Ask the reporter, politely and in advance when possible: what is the story about, who else are you speaking to, when will it run, and is it live or recorded?

3. Decide your role for this interview in one sentence: "I am speaking as..." and keep every answer inside that role.

4. Assume everything you say can be quoted. If you need background terms, agree them explicitly before you start, or do not rely on them.

5. Plan for short answers. Aim to make your main point in the first twenty to thirty seconds of each answer.

6. Note the interview type — live, recorded, print, phone, video — and adjust: slower and shorter for live, exact wording for print.

7. If you are approached without warning, buy time politely: give your name and contact route, ask what they need and by when, and step away to prepare.

A Worked Example

Denise runs a small bakery that employs twelve people. A local TV reporter arrives at lunchtime because a delivery truck has blocked the street and a clip of frustrated drivers is already online. Denise's first instinct is to explain everything — the supplier, the roadworks, the driver's new route — in one long, defensive answer while the camera rolls. Instead, remembering she is speaking through the reporter to her neighbours and customers, she steps aside for two minutes, writes her audience on a sticky note — "people nearby who are stuck and annoyed" — and gives one short answer on camera: she is sorry for the blockage, the truck has moved, and she has changed the delivery time so it will not happen at the lunch rush again. The segment that airs uses almost exactly those words. The long explanation would have been cut to its most frustrated-sounding sentence. The short, audience-first answer survived whole.

Common Mistakes

- **Treating the interview as a chat.** Friendly is good; unguarded is not. Warmth and discipline belong together.

- **Trying to cover everything.** An interview with ten messages has no message. The audience will remember one or two points at most.

- **Believing "off the record" will save you.** Unless terms were clearly agreed in advance, assume you are on the record — because you usually are.

- **Speaking outside your role.** Guessing at causes, other people's motives, or decisions above your level creates quotes you will have to correct later.

- **Blaming the reporter afterward for your own long answer.** Editing is the reporter's job. Brevity is yours.

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Lesson 2 — Build Your Message Before You Need It: Points, Proof, and Soundbites

Nobody thinks clearly for the first time under a bright light with a deadline running. That is why media-trained people build their messages before the interview is booked. A message, in this sense, is not a slogan and it is not a script. It is a small set of true statements — usually three — that answer the audience's real questions: What happened or what do you do? Why does it matter? What are you doing about it, or what should people do next? If you can say those three things clearly, in your own words, with proof, you can handle most interviews on your subject.

Build each message point in three layers. The headline is the point in one plain sentence, the way you would say it to a neighbour. The proof is the fact, number, example, or short story that makes the headline believable. The human detail is the concrete image that helps people remember it. For example, a community clinic might build this point: headline — "Same-week appointments are now available for everyone in the district." Proof — "We added two evening clinics and a Saturday morning clinic this month." Human detail — "That means a parent who works weekdays can bring a child in on Saturday without missing a shift." Notice what this structure does: if only the headline is quoted, your point still lands. If the proof is quoted, it still makes sense. Every layer can stand alone, which is exactly how quoting works.

A soundbite is simply a headline said well: short, concrete, and free of jargon. Twelve to twenty words is a useful target. Compare "We are leveraging synergies to optimize outcomes across the stakeholder ecosystem" — which means nothing and will never be quoted kindly — with "We fixed the booking system, added evening hours, and cut the wait from six weeks to one." The second sentence is quotable because it is specific. Cut words like "world-class," "cutting-edge," and "passionate about excellence." They sound like advertising, and reporters and audiences discount them on hearing. Replace claims with evidence wherever you can: not "safety is our top priority" but "every driver is checked, trained, and re-checked every year — here is the record."

Prepare for the questions you hope nobody asks, too. Make a list of the five hardest fair questions about your topic — about cost, failure, delay, harm, or contradiction — and draft an honest headline answer for each. This is not pessimism; it is the core of the craft. If your prepared answers only cover the friendly questions, you have not prepared. You have only rehearsed a presentation. Your message document, when finished, should fit on one page: three message points with proof, five hard-question answers, the facts you must get exactly right (names, dates, numbers), and the lines you must not cross — private information, unconfirmed facts, and anything under legal advice to leave alone. That one page is what you study in the hour before an interview and what you keep beside the phone during it.

One more discipline: say your messages out loud before the day. Reading silently hides every tongue-twister and every sentence that is too long to breathe through. If you stumble saying it in your kitchen, you will stumble on camera. Shorten until you can say each headline three times in a row, naturally, without looking at the page. That is when it is ready.

The Steps

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1. Write the audience's three real questions at the top of a page: what is it, why does it matter, what happens next?

2. Draft one headline sentence for each question, in plain words you would use with a neighbour.

3. Add proof under each headline: a number, a date, a fact, or a brief real example. If you have no proof, soften the claim until it matches the evidence you do have.

4. Add one human detail per point — a concrete person, place, or moment — without naming anyone private or using anyone's story without permission.

5. List the five hardest fair questions and write an honest headline answer for each.

6. Write the must-be-exact facts (names, titles, dates, figures) and the must-not-say list (unconfirmed facts, private details, legal matters) on the same page.

7. Read everything aloud. Cut any sentence you cannot say comfortably in one breath. Replace jargon with plain words.

8. Keep the finished page to one page. If it does not fit, you have too many messages — choose three.

A Worked Example

Marcus coordinates volunteers for a river clean-up charity. Before a radio interview, he builds his page. Point one: "Anyone can help, and you do not need experience — we train you on the bank in twenty minutes." Proof: "Four hundred people volunteered last year; most had never done it before." Point two: "The river stretch by the market is visibly cleaner than two years ago." Proof: his team logs bags collected and items removed, and he brings the two numbers, checked that morning. Point three: "The next clean-up is Saturday, and families are welcome." His hard-question list includes "Isn't this just doing the council's job for free?" and his honest answer is ready: "The council handles the heavy and hazardous work. Volunteers handle the litter that builds up between those visits, and the council lends us the kit." On air, the presenter asks exactly that question. Marcus answers without heat, in two sentences, and bridges back to the Saturday invitation. Listeners hear confidence because the thinking was done the day before, not invented live.

Common Mistakes

- **Building messages out of adjectives.** "Excellent, leading, trusted" are claims. Numbers, dates, and examples are proof. Audiences believe proof.
- **Memorising a script word for word.** Scripts shatter on the first unexpected question. Learn points and proof, not lines, so you can rebuild an answer in any order.
- **Having no answer for the hard questions.** Hoping a question will not come is not preparation. The hard list is the most valuable part of the page.
- **Using other people's stories without permission.** A moving example that the person involved did not agree to share becomes the story — for the wrong reason.

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- **Letting figures drift.** Saying "about five hundred" in one interview and "nearly a thousand" in another destroys trust in both. Check numbers on the day and use the same ones everywhere.

Lesson 3 — Answer, Bridge, Land: Handling Hard Questions Without Losing the Room

Every interview contains a moment where the question is not the one you wanted. It may be hostile, mistaken, rambling, loaded with a false assumption, or simply about something you do not know. How you handle that moment decides whether the audience trusts you. The good news is that there is a steady method, used by trained spokespeople everywhere, that lets you be honest and still steer your answer toward solid ground. It has three moves: answer, bridge, land.

Answer means you respond to the question that was actually asked, briefly and truthfully, before you do anything else. Skipping straight to your message looks evasive, and audiences punish evasion more than they punish bad news. If the question contains a false claim, correct it calmly as part of the answer: "That figure isn't right — the actual number is..." If you do not know, say so plainly and say what you will do: "I don't know that yet. The inspection report comes out Thursday, and I'll share it the same day." If you cannot share something — because it involves a private individual, an active investigation, or legal advice — say what the boundary is and why, without hiding behind fog: "I can't name the staff member involved. Everyone has a right to privacy while this is reviewed. What I can tell you is what happened and what we've changed."

Bridge is the short phrase that carries you from the answer to your ground: "What matters most here is...", "The step we've taken is...", "For the families listening, the important part is..." A bridge is not a trick to change the subject. Used honestly, it connects the reporter's question to the information the audience most needs. Land means you finish on one of your prepared message points, with its proof, and then you stop. Stopping is a skill. Many interviews are damaged not by what was said in the answer but by the extra sentence added while waiting for the next question — the speculation, the joke, the aside. Say your landing line, close your mouth, and let the silence sit. The reporter will fill it. That is their job.

Certain question types deserve specific handling. The loaded question ("When did you stop cutting corners?") contains an accusation dressed as a fact; unpick the assumption first — "I don't accept that description. Here is what we actually do..." — then answer the real concern underneath. The hypothetical question ("What if the system fails again?") invites you to predict disasters; answer with what is in place now, not with speculation about futures you cannot know. The multi-part question hides three questions in one breath; it is fair to say "There were three questions there — let me take the first one," answer it well, and invite the reporter to repeat the others. The repeated question — the same challenge asked three ways — is usually a sign the reporter needs a clearer or shorter answer, not a louder one; give the same honest answer in fewer words rather than escalating. And the personal question, aimed at you rather than the topic, is best met briefly and returned to the subject: keep it short, do not take the bait, bridge back.

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Underneath all of this sits temperament. You will never regret being calm, and you will often regret being clever at a reporter's expense. Never argue, never mock a question, never say "no comment" — a phrase that audiences hear as "guilty and hiding." If you feel anger or panic rising, slow down. A pause of two seconds feels long to you and looks thoughtful to everyone else. Breathe, find your message page in your mind, and make the next sentence a true one.

The Steps

1. Listen to the whole question without interrupting, and note the real concern underneath it.
2. Answer that concern first, in one or two honest sentences. Correct false figures calmly, with the true figure if you have it.
3. If you do not know, say so, name when or how the answer will be known, and offer to provide it.
4. If you cannot share something, name the boundary plainly — privacy, safety, an active review — and offer what you can share instead.
5. Bridge with a short phrase toward your prepared ground.
6. Land on one message point with its proof. Then stop talking.
7. For loaded questions, unpick the false assumption before answering. For hypotheticals, answer with present facts and safeguards, not predictions.
8. Keep your voice level and your pace slow. If you need a moment, take a breath and a sip of water. Pauses look like thoughtfulness, not weakness.

A Worked Example

Priya manages a housing association. In a live radio interview about a repair backlog, the presenter says: "Residents say you've been ignoring damp complaints for a year because you don't care about that estate. True?" The question is loaded and personal. Priya does not defend her feelings. She answers the concern: "It's true that repairs on that estate took too long, and I'm sorry for that. The average wait there was eleven weeks. That's not acceptable, and it's why we changed the system." She bridges: "What residents need to know is what happens when they report damp now." She lands on her prepared point: "Since March, every damp report gets a visit within five working days, and we've completed 210 of those visits." The presenter pushes once more, and Priya repeats the core answer in shorter form rather than arguing. Afterward, callers to the station mention the five-day visit promise — her landing line — not the accusation. The answer-bridge-land structure carried her message through a hostile opening without a single dishonest word.

Common Mistakes

- **Saying "no comment."** It protects nothing and convicts you in the audience's mind. Explain the boundary and offer what you can say instead.
- **Answering a question you were not asked while ignoring the one you were.** Bridging without answering first is the definition of sounding evasive.

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• **Speculating.** Guessing at causes, outcomes, or other people's motives creates tomorrow's correction. "We don't know yet, and here's how we'll find out" is a complete answer.

• **Adding one sentence too many.** The aside after a good answer — a joke, a complaint, a hint — is frequently the quote that runs. Land and stop.

• **Matching a hostile tone.** If you sound angry, the story becomes your anger. Calm is not softness; it is control.

• **Repeating a negative phrase from the question.** If you say "We are not a corrupt organisation," the audience hears the accusation with your voice attached. Answer in positive, factual terms of your own.

Lesson 4 — Body, Voice, Camera, and Room: How Delivery Decides Whether Words Are Believed

Audiences judge a message by more than its words, especially on camera. This is not unfair or shallow; it is human. If your words say "everything is under control" while your eyes dart, your shoulders climb, and your voice speeds up, people believe the body. Media training therefore treats delivery as part of the message. The goal is not to perform or to become someone else. The goal is to remove the distractions that stop your real words from being heard.

Start with the body. Sit or stand tall but not stiff, with your weight even and your hands visible and mostly still. Hands hidden under a desk or in pockets can read as guardedness on camera; hands waving constantly read as agitation. A slight lean toward the interviewer signals engagement. Eye contact needs care by format: in a studio interview, look at the reporter, not the camera, unless you are told otherwise. In a remote video interview, look at the camera lens when you make your key points, because to the viewer that is eye contact. On a video call, raise the camera to eye level — a laptop on a low desk films up your nose and shrinks your authority — and sit an arm's length away so your head and shoulders fill the frame comfortably.

Voice carries more trust than most people realise. Slow down by about a fifth from your normal pace; nerves speed everyone up, and fast speech reads as anxiety even when the words are sound. Lower your volume slightly and let sentences end downwards. A rising tone at the end of statements makes facts sound like questions you are unsure of. Pause before your most important sentence rather than after it, so the audience is listening when it arrives. Drink water before you start. If your mouth goes dry mid-interview, a calm sip is normal and human; apologising repeatedly for it is what draws attention.

Appearance and setting are messages too. Wear what fits the role and the audience: solid colours film better than fine stripes, busy patterns, or logos you do not intend to advertise. Remove jangling jewellery that microphones pick up. Check the background as the audience will see it — on video calls, that means no private documents, no unmade chaos, no bright window behind you turning your face into a silhouette. Light should fall on your face from the front. For in-person interviews, arrive early enough to see the room, sit in the chair, and get comfortable being looked at before the questions start. And plan for the microphone rule: a mic that is fitted is live. Some of the most damaging quotes in media history were said in the thirty seconds

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before or after the formal interview, to a microphone the speaker forgot. From the moment a mic is on you until it is physically removed, you are in the interview.

None of this requires talent. It requires a mirror, a phone to record practice answers, and the honesty to watch the playback. Everyone dislikes their first playback. Watch it anyway, with your message page beside you, and fix one thing at a time: pace first, then pauses, then hands. Three practice rounds transform most people's delivery.

The Steps

1. Record yourself answering three practice questions on your phone before any real interview. Watch the playback once for pace, once for hands and eyes, once for words.
2. Set up your position: camera or chair at eye level, light on your face from the front, background tidy and free of private papers.
3. Choose clothing in solid colours, appropriate to your role, without distracting patterns, slogans, or noisy jewellery.
4. During the interview, keep hands visible and mostly still, sit tall, and lean very slightly toward the interviewer.
5. Speak about a fifth slower than normal. End statements with a falling tone. Pause before key lines.
6. Look at the reporter in person; look at the lens for key points on video calls.
7. Treat every fitted microphone and every rolling camera as live, including before the first question and after the last one.
8. Keep water within reach and use it without fuss when you need a pause.

A Worked Example

Tom leads a small logistics firm and records a remote interview for an online business programme from his office. His first practice recording, which he almost skips, shows the problems clearly: his laptop sits low, so the camera looks up at him; a window behind him makes his face dark; and he answers at high speed while tapping a pen that the microphone turns into a drumbeat. He fixes the setting in fifteen minutes — laptop raised on books, chair turned so the window light falls on his face, pen put in a drawer, a plain wall behind him. He re-records and deliberately slows down, pausing before his main point about delivery times. In the broadcast interview the next day, the presenter later tells him he came across as "the calm one" in a programme about an industry under pressure. Nothing about his knowledge changed overnight. Only the delivery stopped arguing with his words.

Common Mistakes

- **Never watching yourself on playback.** The discomfort of one practice viewing prevents the much larger discomfort of learning your habits from the broadcast.
- **Dressing for yourself instead of the audience.** Slogan shirts, rival logos, and novelty items become the screenshot. When in doubt, plain and role-appropriate wins.

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- **Forgetting the microphone is live.** Casual remarks while a mic is fitted — jokes, complaints, names — are recorded and quotable. Stay in interview mode until the mic is off and away.
- **Speaking at nervous speed.** Fast answers sound evasive even when they are honest. Slowing down is the single highest-value delivery fix for most people.
- **Staring at your own image on a video call.** You appear to be looking down and away. Look at the lens for your key points, and glance at the reporter between them.

Lesson 5 — Before, During, After: The Full Interview System, and the Crisis Hour

Good interviews look effortless because the work happened off camera. This final lesson gives you the complete routine — before, during, and after — and then applies it to the hardest case of all: the crisis interview, when something has gone wrong, facts are incomplete, and everyone wants a statement now.

Before the interview, preparation has four parts. Research: confirm the outlet, the programme or publication, the reporter if you can, and the likely audience. A trade magazine interview can go deep and technical; a breakfast TV segment needs plain words and human detail. Questions: build your hard-question list from Lesson 2 and update it for this specific story — what has changed, what is being said online, what would you ask if you were the reporter? Logistics: confirm time, place, format, length, live or recorded, and who else is being interviewed. Bring your one-page message sheet, your checked facts, water, and a spare layer of clothing if cameras and lights are involved — studios run hot and cold unpredictably. Authority: confirm what you are authorised to say and announce. If a decision has not been made, your line is when it will be made and who will announce it — never improvise an announcement to fill a silence.

During the interview, run a simple loop: listen fully, pause, answer, bridge, land, stop. Keep track of your own facts as you go; if you misspeak a number or a name, correct it in the interview itself, immediately and without drama: "Let me correct that figure — it was 210 visits, not 120." A self-correction made calmly builds trust. A wrong figure left standing becomes the story and the correction story after it. If an interview turns genuinely abusive or is built on a premise you have corrected repeatedly, you may end it politely — "I want to help your audience, and I've answered that three times; let's use the time for their other questions" — but treat ending early as a last resort, because the empty chair also tells a story.

After the interview, the work is not done. Thank the reporter briefly and factually. If you promised information — a figure, a document, a follow-up answer — send it by the time you promised, even if the update is that it is delayed. That reliability is remembered the next time your name comes up in a newsroom. Watch or read the finished piece promptly. If it contains a factual error that matters, contact the outlet calmly with the correct fact and your source; most errors are honest deadline mistakes and are corrected when approached that way. If the error is minor or a matter of emphasis, let it go — complaining about everything ensures nothing is heard. Keep a

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short note of what ran, what questions surprised you, and what you would prepare differently. That note is the start of your next interview's hard-question list.

The crisis hour deserves its own rules, because it reverses normal conditions: the demand for information is highest exactly when verified information is scarcest. The principles that hold are these. Speed matters, but accuracy matters more; a fast wrong statement is worse than a slightly slower true one. Your first statement needs only four elements, and they can be short: what you know happened, in plain words; what you are doing about it now; what people affected should do, if anything; and when you will update next — a specific time, which you then honour even if the update is "we still do not have the confirmed cause." Express concern for people before property, money, or reputation, and mean it; audiences forgive accidents far more readily than they forgive indifference. Never speculate on cause, never blame before facts, never minimise ("only a small leak," "just a few complaints") — minimising language in a crisis is the quote that returns in every later story. Designate one spokesperson so the public hears one consistent account, and log every fact as it is confirmed, with the time, so your statements never contradict each other. If your organisation made the mistake, say so as soon as that is verified, say what changes because of it, and do not bury the apology under conditions. A clean, early, specific apology with action attached is the strongest crisis answer there is — and the rarest, which is why it works.

The Steps

1. Before: confirm outlet, audience, format, live or recorded, length, and deadline. Research what is already being said about the story.
2. Before: update your one-page message sheet — three points with proof, five hard questions, exact facts, must-not-say list — and confirm what you are authorised to announce.
3. During: run the loop — listen, pause, answer, bridge, land, stop. Correct your own errors immediately and calmly.
4. During: keep answers shorter as pressure rises. Pressure tempts people to over-explain; over-explaining is where contradictions are born.
5. After: deliver every promised follow-up by the promised time. Reliability is reputation.
6. After: review the finished piece. Correct material factual errors calmly with sources; let minor matters of emphasis go.
7. After: write a short debrief note — what ran, what surprised you, what to prepare next time — and file it with your message sheet.
8. In a crisis: give the four elements — what happened, what you are doing, what people should do, when you will update next — express concern for people first, and honour the update time even if there is little new to say.

A Worked Example

Late one evening, a fire alarm failure at a community centre run by Aisha's charity is posted online with a shaky phone video and a claim that "no staff helped the children out." A regional

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reporter calls Aisha within the hour. Facts are thin: the alarm panel fault is real, the evacuation did happen, and no one was hurt — but Aisha has not yet confirmed the timeline. She does not wait for perfect information, and she does not guess. Her holding interview, given once and repeated consistently, is: "This evening the fire alarm at our centre failed to sound during a fault. Staff evacuated all thirty-two children using the manual procedure, and no one was hurt. Engineers are on site now, the centre is closed tomorrow while the system is replaced, and I will update at nine tomorrow morning with the confirmed timeline." Concern first, no blame, no minimising, a named next update. At nine the next morning she delivers the timeline, including the honest finding that the fault had been reported the previous week and not escalated — which she states herself, with the new checking routine that follows from it. Because she disclosed it, the story that runs is about a failure found and fixed. Had she hidden it until the reporter found it, the story would have been about a cover-up. The crisis system did not make the failure disappear. It made her account of it the trusted one.

Common Mistakes

- **Waiting for complete information before saying anything.** Silence in a crisis is filled by whoever is least careful. A short, true holding statement beats a late, perfect one.
- **Speculating on cause to sound knowledgeable.** "Probably an electrical fault" becomes the headline and then the contradiction when the report says otherwise. Say what is confirmed and label the rest as not yet known.
- **Minimising language.** "Only," "just," and "small" attached to harm read as indifference. State facts plainly and let the audience judge scale.
- **Missing your own promised update time.** The update appointment is a trust test. Keep it even when the update is brief.
- **Letting several people give separate accounts.** Different numbers and different timelines from the same organisation destroy credibility faster than bad news does. One spokesperson, one log of confirmed facts.
- **Burying an apology.** "Sorry if anyone was offended" is not an apology. Name what went wrong, say sorry for it plainly, and attach the change that follows.

Try It

Set aside ninety minutes and run a full practice interview on a topic you know. First, build your one-page message sheet exactly as Lesson 2 describes: three message points with proof and a human detail each, five hard questions with honest headline answers, your must-be-exact facts, and your must-not-say list. Then ask a friend or colleague to play the reporter using your hard-question list plus two questions of their own invention, and record the whole interview on a phone, camera on. Answer using the answer-bridge-land method, keep answers under forty seconds, and practise landing and stopping.

Watch the recording twice. The first time, score only your words: Did you answer before you bridged? Did you speculate anywhere? Did you say anything you would not want quoted? The second time, watch with the sound off: What does your body say — pace of movement, hands,

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eyes, posture? Write down the two biggest fixes and record a second, shorter interview applying only those two fixes. Finish by writing a crisis holding statement for a realistic bad-news scenario in your world, using the four elements from Lesson 5, in no more than five sentences. Keep all of it — message sheet, recordings, statement — in one folder. That folder is your starting kit for the first real interview, and it will be better than most spokespeople ever prepare.

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