

Media tips: What to do when the media calls . . .

1. Ask questions. Determine the name of the publication or network. Find out what the story is about, the reporter's angle, when the deadline is. If you don't feel qualified to answer or are uncomfortable with the approach, feel free to suggest other angles or sources of information.

2. Be clear about who you are representing—yourself, your library, the American Library Association, or state chapter.

3. Be prepared to answer the standard Who-What-When-Where-Why-and-How questions. Have supporting facts and examples available.

4. Beware of manipulation. Some reporters may ask leading questions, something like “Would you say that . . .” or “Isn't it true . . .” followed by an idea for your agreement. Make your own statement.

5. Think first. Think about the subject, your audience, and what message you want to convey. Don't be pressured into responding. If you need more time, tell the reporter you'll call back.

6. Pause before answering questions to think about what you want to say and the best

way to say it. Do not repeat a negative. Make sure your comments are positive.

7. Be brief, to the point. If the reporter wants to know more, he or she will ask. This is even more important with the broadcast media when you may have only 20 seconds to respond.

8. Never say “No comment.” Maintain an open, positive attitude. If you are waiting for direction from your board or need time to study the issue, say so.

9. Remember, it's okay to admit you don't know. “I don't know” is a legitimate answer. Reporters would rather have no answer than the wrong answer. Tell them you'll get the information and call back. Or, refer them to someone else.

10. Be sure to talk about librarians. Librarians don't happen by themselves. Make clear that there are professionals who design and provide these services.

11. Alert the ALA Public Information Office if there is an issue or incident that you feel merits comment, research, or additional briefing material from ALA.

. . . and some quotes your audience will love

Remember, it's not just what you say but how you say it. Something colorful and to the point is more likely to be quoted in the media—and remembered by your listeners. Keep this list on hand for quoting to reporters, in speeches, in conversation. Use it for inspiration in creating your own “quotable quotes.”

A national treasure

- There are more libraries (100,000+) in the United States than there are McDonalds.
- Libraries help business to flourish, doctors to heal, children to read, scientists to discover.
- Libraries serve people of all ages and

backgrounds—and you don't have to be in school, broke, or in trouble to benefit.

- More children participate in library summer reading programs (est. 700,000+) than in Little League baseball.

- More than 14.2 million students, faculty (and public) use college and university libraries each week—more than watch the top-rated TV network.

Your right to know

- Academic librarians answer more than 1.6 million reference questions each week—that's 666 questions every minute.
- College and university libraries circulate

more than 154 million books and other items each year.

- Librarians make it happen.
- The most valuable resource of any library goes home every night.
- Librarianship is the only profession dedicated to the Right to Know.
- Librarians make information affordable, available, and accessible.
- Librarians put the "know" in knowledge.

Save money/fund libraries

- Libraries will get your through times of no money better than money will get you through times of no libraries.
- In 24 years, federal funding for libraries totals less than the cost of one aircraft carrier (est. \$3.5 billion).
- Public libraries cost taxpayers an average of \$15.10 annually per capita—less than dinner for two at a moderate restaurant.
- Libraries save business leaders, scientists, and engineers an estimated \$19 billion a year in information resources.

More inspiration

- "Libraries are not basic—they're essential. If politicians want to save money, they

should fund libraries."—*Patricia Glass Schuman, president, ALA*

- "The library is to the rest of the college what the soul is to the rest of the body."—*Joshua Stein, professor, Roger Williams College*
- "... it's hypocritical, stupid, and ridiculous to talk about the importance of quality education when they're closing libraries."—*U.S. Rep. Major Owens (D-NY)*
- "Defend your local library as if your freedom depended on it."—*John Jakes, author*
- "It is virtually impossible to conceive of a literate and civilized society without libraries."—*U.S. Sen. Alan Simpson (R-??)*
- "The service rendered by libraries is as necessary as that of the press, the colleges, or the schools. In less political and more philosophical terms, we exist to serve freedom."—*Timothy Healy, president, New York Public Library*
- "The library is central to our free society. It is a critical element in the free exchange of information at the heart of our democracy."—*Vartan Gregorian, former president, New York University*

Ed note: These tips are reprinted with permission from the handouts prepared by ALA for a media training workshop. ■

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