



[UCAR Home](#) | [NCAR](#)

[SIP Home](#)

[Current Edition](#)

[Previous Editions](#)

[Future Editions](#)

[About Us](#)

[Subscribe](#)

[Contact](#)

[NCAR](#) > [SIP](#) > [Weather and Society Watch](#) > [Program Highlights](#)

Current Edition

- [Guest Editorial](#)
- [From the Director](#)
- [Focus on Research](#)
- [Highlights](#)
- [Conferences & More](#)
- [Jobs & Opportunities](#)
- [Downloadable PDF](#)

Previous Editions

- [Vol. 1.4 - July 20, 2007](#)
- [Vol. 1.3 - April 20, 2007](#)
- [Vol. 1.2 - Jan. 10, 2007](#)
- [Vol. 1.1 - Oct. 20, 2006](#)
- [WeatherZine 1996-2002](#)

Future Editions

- [Submit Your Ideas](#)

About Us

- [Contact Us](#)
- [Subscribe to Newsletter](#)
- [Related Resources](#)
- [SIP Home Page](#)

Weather and Society Watch Program Highlights

[Highlight 1](#) | [Highlight 2](#)

Simple Tips for Interacting with the Media

by Ilan Kelman*

1. Know your key messages before the interview and stick to them. Think about how to say those messages in different ways, especially with personal anecdotes and examples. Try to answer any questions based on those key messages with real-life evidence.
2. State the obvious. Assume that the audience is intelligent, but ignorant of the topic—a statement that applies to most of us anyway. If you are too basic or too wordy, the journalist will intervene and let you know.
3. Be concise.
4. Be yourself, but don't relax too much or become too informal. Instead, stay focused and be aware of what you and the journalist are saying—and how that could be represented or reinterpreted after editing.
5. Avoid jargon, academic phrases, equations, and big words. Don't speak in "academicese."
6. If your interview will be edited, remember to take a deep breath and pause before each answer. You're not in a conversation. You're giving sound bites from which the journalist or editor will pick and choose. If you mess up, stumble, or wish to rephrase, say "I would like to do that again." Then, pause and start again. Don't be afraid to ask the journalist before the interview whether he or she is looking for a specific



phrase, quotation, or angle. *But, if the interview is live or if the journalist doesn't want to do any editing, the rules are different.* Once, a senior U.K. politician who was being interviewed on the radio stumbled on his words, swore, and asked to redo his answer. The journalist's response was "Sorry, but we are actually live on the air."

7. Treat journalists with respect. They are professionals and know what they're doing within the boundaries of their job—exactly as scientists are professionals who know what we're doing within the boundaries of our jobs.

8. Never speak off the record. Assume that everything you say will be attributed to you. Treat every microphone as live and recording, even if the journalist says it is not or says that it is a test run.

9. If you don't know, say so. Never say "No comment." Instead, comments such as "I don't know enough to answer that question" work. If the journalist will be available for a few days, offer to research the question and follow up. Do so responsibly.

10. Never become angry or upset. Don't be evasive, hostile, or condescending. Be as helpful as you can, but set clear limits on what you know and will say. If you make a mistake, say so (especially in a recorded interview) rather than trying to cover up the error.

11. Ask for questions or topics in advance, which can help in setting limits on the topics to which you can speak. Nonetheless, be prepared for the journalist to deviate from that list or to ask different questions.

12. Use common sense and draw on your emotional intelligence quotient as well as your intelligence quotient.

***Ilan (ilan_kelman@yahoo.com), a frequent contributor to *Weather and Society Watch*, is a postdoctoral fellow through NCAR's Advanced Study Program. He works with the Center for Capacity Building. For more information on Ilan's research, please visit <http://www.ilankelman.org>.**

Photo credit:

Fall leaves decorate steps in Robert Treman Park, south of Ithaca, N.Y. - Photo by Samuel Barber

