



# Services for LC members

- Workshops on working with the news media
- Website development and newsletters
- Guides for homestay students and host families
- CLASS program management software
- Placement testing from Cambridge-Michigan

Doug Ronson  
ESQ Educational Services  
douglasronson@yahoo.ca

# **Working with the news media: Ensuring your message gets through**

Doug Ronson  
ESQ Educational Services  
March 2016



# My background

## In the media

- Newspaper reporter and editor for 13 years
- Deliver media training workshops to companies, including Bombardier

## In the English-language field:

- Website development and newsletters
- Guides for homestay students and host families
- CLASS program management software
- Placement testing from Cambridge-Michigan



# Stories from the headlines:

Dalhousie international student dies in residence from alcohol poisoning

Ontario Minister of Colleges and Universities expresses concern about all-male colleges run by Algonquin, Niagara

International student struck, killed by car in Toronto



# Stories from the headlines:

[Four international students killed in crash of duck boat, bus](#)

Seattle, Washington



# Today's agenda

- What are the goal's of today's session?
- How the news media works
- Pitfalls and problems
- Crafting your messages
- Conveying your messages
- Your very own media interviews



# Why being prepared is important

- An incident can happen at any time. You need to be ready if the media contact you for information.
- In a fragmented and diverse media landscape, it can be difficult to get your message heard. Consistency is key.
- A 24-hour news cycle means that misrepresented information or communication errors can quickly spin out of control.
- You aren't in control. Your message can easily be misinterpreted – unless you carefully respond to each question.



**Eleven killed in massive oil rig  
explosion in Gulf of Mexico in 2010**









# What NOT to say

[President of BP Oil](#)



# What to expect

- Reporters will know little about your company. There is a risk they will get some of the information wrong.
- Reporters want the information so that they can do their story. They get frustrated if people aren't helpful.
- Most reporters aren't malicious. You must help them avoid mistakes.
- With a 24-hour news cycle, reporters are always on deadline. You need to be able to respond quickly.



# Rules for working with reporters

- Don't go "off the record." Assume that everything you say could be published.
- Never say "no comment." It sounds like you are hiding something.
- You don't get to "approve" what is published or aired.
- However, you can offer to "check facts." Let them know you are available to help.
- You can't request questions in advance.



# Rules for working with reporters

- Keep it simple. The reporter and audience will find it easier to understand.
- You don't control the story – the reporter does. However, you can control your message.
- Reporters are human. They can only remember so much. Speak at a reasonable pace and be clear. This will help to avoid your being misquoted.



# Developing your messages

- Develop two or three messages that you want to convey. This allows you to have greater control on the story.
- It's important to repeat your messages but don't repeat the exact words. Think of them as "themes."



# Phrasing your messages

- You should answer the reporter's question. But you don't have to provide a Yes or No answer:  
"Did the company break the law?"  
Wrong: "No, we did not break the law."  
Right: "The company has always complied with the law."
- Keep it short and simple. "Sound bites" are effective.
- Be declarative: "We are in this to win."





# Responding to interview questions

Follow the ABC Method:

- Answer the question.
- Bridge your response with “and, in addition, as well ....”
- Connect to your message. This allows you to take control of the agenda.



# Responding to questions about a human tragedy

Follow the three R Method:

- Regret. “Our thoughts go out to the family ....”
- Reason: Explain what happened or that the incident is being investigated.
- Remedy: “We are looking at ways that this type of accident can be prevented in future.”



**47 killed in rail crash in Lac Megantic**



# Responding to questions about a human tragedy

Follow the three R Method:

- Regret. “Our thoughts go out to the family ....”
- Reason: Explain what happened or that the incident is being investigated.
- Remedy: “We are looking at ways that this type of accident can be prevented in future.”





# Practice media interviews

Let's try it!

- I will provide you with a scenario. Develop three key messages at your table.
- We'll discuss and refine the key messages.

Each table will need two spokespeople:

- One to talk about your key messages
- One to be interviewed by the journalist (me)



# Scenario

One of your international students from China has been seriously injured in a fire at a homestay. The cause of the fire is unknown but the student was cooking when the fire started. Damage was \$20,000. The host family was not home at the time. The local TV station has asked you for an interview.

- Develop three key messages at your table.

Each table will need two spokespeople:

- One to talk about your key messages
- One to be interviewed by the journalist (me)



# What are your key messages?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.





# Practice interviews

One of your international students from China has been seriously injured in a fire at a homestay. The cause of the fire is unknown but the student was cooking at the time. The local TV station has asked you for an interview.

- I will interview a spokesperson from each table. The task is to cover all of your key messages in the interview.
- The audience's role: After each interview, we will discuss how it went.




# **How do I generate positive news media coverage for my organization?**

- What's worked for you?



# How do I generate news media coverage for my organization?

- Know how to tell stories. What's interesting for readers?
- Offer to serve as an expert when the reporter needs comments.
- The media love trends. If you spot one, alert a reporter or editor.
- Economic contribution to local economy



One newspaper wrote about how a host mother became such good friends with a student that she went to visit the family in Turkey – and was invited to a family wedding.



# Tips for getting coverage

- Get to know individual writers – they will have an influence on what is covered.
- Follow reporters on Twitter. Retweet their stories.
- Add comments on reporters' stories.



# The medium is the message

- TV is a visual medium
- Students dressing up, carving pumpkins, making Christmas decorations.
- Students celebrating their own holidays, cooking traditional meals.



# **Your story has been published, now what?**

- Monitor comments and respond if appropriate.
- Share the story on Twitter. Give the writer credit in your Tweet.
- Monitor Twitter and be prepared to respond.
- Post a link to the story on Facebook.
- Send a follow-up email thanking the writer. Why? To build relationship for future opportunities.



# Preparing for the interview

- Phone interviews: Conduct the interview from a conference room.
- TV interviews on set: Look at the host. If it's a panel, look at the person speaking.
- Stand-up interview: Look at the reporter.





# What if I don't know the answer?

- If the interview is for print or not live, you can say you don't know. Promise to check and get back to the reporter (and do so quickly).
- If you are on camera, you can say something like: “That’s unclear, but what I can tell you is ....” or “Here’s what I can tell you ...”



# What if the reporter gets it wrong?

- If minor details, are wrong don't worry about it.
- When there are major errors, you can contact the reporter or editor about a follow-up.
- You can use Twitter, Facebook or your own press release to make updates or clarifications .... Just be gentle because the reporter likely did not make the mistake on purpose



**Thank you!**

**Questions?**

Doug Ronson

613-888-9560

[douglasronson@yahoo.ca](mailto:douglasronson@yahoo.ca)



# Services for LC members

- Workshops on working with the news media
- Website development and newsletters
- Guides for homestay students and host families
- CLASS program management software
- Placement testing from Cambridge-Michigan

Doug Ronson  
ESQ Educational Services  
douglasronson@yahoo.ca