



# HOW TO TALK TO JOURNALISTS

*A CHEAT SHEET*

## Remember

**You are the expert on your own life.** Tell the story you want to tell about yourself.

**Be honest.** Truthfulness and facts are central to journalistic ethics.

**Know your worth.** Reporters come to you for a reason. They may be intimidating because they have a mic or a camera, but you have a perspective they need. Media outlets also want to expand their audiences, and that includes you.



## Common Questions

**Will all my words be published?** Probably not. Journalists are often working with a limited word count or air time. They will likely use one short sound bite or quote from you. It's also possible they will not use your interview at all. Reporters and their editors decide what will get published.

**Can I see a copy of the story before it's published?** Probably not. It is against journalistic ethics to have sources review a story before it's published. Imagine if a journalist were to do a piece about government corruption. You wouldn't want the government agency to review the story and edit it. Editors review stories for accuracy.

**When will the story be published?** It depends on the type of story. Some stories are short and may air on the radio or be published online the same day you talk to the reporter. Other times a reporter might work on a story for several weeks or months. It's OK to follow up with the reporter that talked to you and ask when it might be done and that they let you know where to find or hear the story

**Can I speak with a fact-checker?** You are welcome to ask reporters about their fact-checking process or how they make sure a story is accurate. Not all outlets have fact-checkers. If the story is an investigative story or a long-form/magazine format, designated fact-checkers are more common. At KPCC/LAist, reporters and editors are responsible for verifying information.

**What if I am asked about something that makes me feel uncomfortable?** Your story is your own and during an interview you have full control over what you say to a reporter. Answer questions in any way that makes you feel most comfortable and you can always decline to answer a question.

### **What do I do if a reporter asks me about my immigration status?**

For many stories, immigration status is irrelevant. If it seems like the reporter is asking you about your status out of curiosity, you can let the reporter know that status is not relevant.

### **Is the newsroom I'm speaking with biased?**

See this chart of bias by media outlets:

[adfontesmedia.com/interactive-media-bias-chart](http://adfontesmedia.com/interactive-media-bias-chart)

**What does "off the record" mean?** You often hear this term in TV and movies, but it is much less common in reality. It means that you are sharing something that is not for publication. "Off the record" counts only if the agreement is mutual. It's probably better to assume that everything you say is "on the record."

### **Do I need to pay to be in a news story? Can I get paid?**

No and no. You will not pay or get paid to be in a news story because this is against journalistic ethics. Anyone who receives payment for a story could be swayed to bend the truth.

**What if the reporter gets my story wrong?** If you feel that the reporter misrepresented your story, you can ask for a correction. Reporters try to avoid corrections, so only ask if you are sure that something is factually incorrect. If the statements made were factually incorrect and harm your reputation so much that you need to take legal action, it is also possible to file a civil defamation claim. See: [medialaw.org/topics-page/defamation-faqs](http://medialaw.org/topics-page/defamation-faqs)

**How can I prepare for an interview?** Think about the main point/s you want to get across in your interview. What are the most critical things for the reporter to know? Some people like to organize their thoughts into three major points. If you are not used to telling your story, you may want to have a friend ask you some questions to practice. Depending on the story, a reporter may also ask if you have any pictures to share that they can use to help tell the story.

**How can I get a journalist's attention?** Contact reporters by Twitter or send them a personal email. If you meet a reporter, get their business card. It will usually have a direct phone number to talk with them.

## Get involved with KPCC/LAist

### **Become a news source for KPCC**

Join the Public Insight Network and when reporters are working on a story, you will receive an email to give input.  
[kpcc.org/network](http://kpcc.org/network)

### **Ask KPCC/LAist reporters questions**

See the bottom of any LAist story or any reporter's bio and enter your question into the box.

### **Follow our engagement work**

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