

# Media Demystification

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The thought of media interviews gives me hives, so I figured it was time to learn more about them and hopefully de-stress a little. At the 2010 RT Booklovers' Convention, I attended wonderful sessions presented by Morgan Doremus and Planned Television Arts). Here are some tips I picked up. (Note that the speakers recommended bullet points, so I'm applying that lesson here.)

- What do I do before seeking an interview?
  - Do your research and target the appropriate person (e.g., associate producer of "morning drive" radio show, entertainment editor of local newspaper, person who schedules interviews for @online).
  - Prepare a 30-second elevator speech: who you are, what your book is, what's distinctive about you and it.
  - Prepare a press kit containing: press release for your latest book or event; bio (include awards, credentials); news tie-ins (to current news story or holiday) – let them know what's the story and why their audience should care; 10-15 suggested interview questions and answers of 70-125 words; press clippings; contact info on every page (name, book title, phone, email); sample excerpts of 1/2 page (with a short lead-in to give context). Bullet points are good. Put your press kit on your website.
- Where do I start? Local newspapers and radio are a good starting point. So are online @. Gain experience and comfort, then expand out.
- When should I make contact? For print, 3-6 months ahead. For TV and radio, 3-4 weeks. For online @, check their guidelines. Even if you don't have that kind of lead time, give it a try. If you have everything organized and make it easy for the interviewer, you may get an interview right away.
- How do I get an interview? Ask for it, and make it easy for them – e.g., give them a story with an exciting hook, include sample questions and answers, provide your contact info and relevant biographical info.
- How should I make contact?
  - You are your best spokesperson, so try to make personal contact rather than have an assistant do it.
  - If you can do it face-to-face, so much the better. Take your press kit and a copy of your book and have your elevator speech ready.
  - If you email: don't have attachments; have all your contact info at the beginning and also have it in a signature line that includes everything (website, blog, Facebook, Twitter, etc.); start with the hook; if possible, connect the story with current news; provide ideas for things to talk about; tell them who you are. Use bullet points.

- How do I prepare for the interview?
  - Think about points (e.g., 5) that you'd like to make and think of 1 or 2 short anecdotes to go along with each. Write them on a single index card.
  - Think about questions you might be asked, and how you'd respond. Think about questions you'd rather not be asked, and prepare for them (e.g., if they ask whether you research love scenes with your husband, you might say, "Better with him than with someone else's."). If an interviewer asks a tacky question, you could say, "Sorry? What did you say?" They may well not repeat it because it's likely to make them look foolish. Think about ways to bridge from a question you don't want to answer to a point you want to make (e.g., "It's interesting you'd ask that because it makes me think of ...").
  - Decide if you're going to take anything with you. For example, on radio, can you take books for give-aways to the audience? For TV, can you take a poster or other visual cue that might be used in the studio?
  - If you haven't read your own book recently, read it before you're interviewed. It's embarrassing if you can't answer questions about your own book!
- How do I relax? Convince yourself it's something you want to do, prepare, and dress comfortably.
- What about my appearance? Don't wear black, white, or green; don't wear patterned fabric or a high neckline; don't pull your hair back tight from your face. Wear either a rich pink or deep saturated colors (e.g., darker shades of burgundy, red, teal, and cobalt blue), solid colors, and an open neckline. Don't wear jewelry that reflects light or makes noise. Wear matte make-up, darker than normal, and nothing shiny; wear lipstick/gloss a shade or two darker than usual; overdo your make-up a little but not too much. @@
- What do I do when I arrive at the station? Chat, connect, and make people like you.
- How should I act during the interview? Don't fidget, try to be comfortable, and find out where you're supposed to look (for TV) and what you're supposed to speak into (if there's a microphone). Have a conversation with the interviewer. Don't over-think; don't stop and formulate an answer in your head or you'll come across as stilted. Be genuine so your audience will get to know you and think of you as a friend. Figure out what the audience would like to know and make it interesting for them. Don't use a hard sell; be interesting and bring the audience into your world. Give value-added content over what they'd find on Amazon – e.g., behind the scenes info, anecdotes. Always assume an interview is live and assume that whatever you say will be on the internet forever.
- Who's in control? It's your interview so take control. How do you make the interviewer ask you the questions you want them to? Give them a list of questions ahead of time; have a visual cue (e.g., a book poster, which might even get displayed in the TV studio); use bridging. Don't waste time on niceties other than the basics; use the time effectively. Most interviewers are happy if you take the lead and make the story. Make the interviewer look good and they'll make you good – and invite you back.

- How long will the interview be? TV is usually 4-5 minutes; radio is double that or longer.
- What do I do after the interview? Thank everyone and consider following up with a written thank-you card or note.

Here's my suggestion. Why not hold practice sessions? You could do this for a local RWA Chapter workshop. You might videotape the interviews and analyze them afterward. The more you practice, the more comfortable you'll be.

*©Susan Lyons. International bestselling author Susan Lyons, who also writes as Susan Fox and Savanna Fox, writes "emotionally compelling, sexy contemporary romance" (Publishers Weekly). Visit her website at [www.susanlyons.ca](http://www.susanlyons.ca).*