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# Developing Effective Media Relations



**By David Ortiz**  
**Media Relations Manager**  
**No More Homeless Pets**



**Best Friends**  
ANIMAL SOCIETY

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## About Best Friends\*

Best Friends is working with you – and with humane groups all across the country – to bring about a time when there are no more homeless pets.

The sanctuary at Angel Canyon, in the Golden Circle of southern Utah, is home, on any given day, to about 1,500 dogs, cats, and other animals from all over the country. Many of them need just a few weeks of special care before they're ready to go to good new homes. Others, who are older and sicker, or who have suffered extra trauma, find a home and a haven here, and are given loving care for the rest of their lives.

Best Friends manages a model No More Homeless Pets campaign, with shelters and humane groups statewide, to ensure that every healthy companion animal that's ever born can be guaranteed a loving, caring home.

And Best Friends reaches across the nation, helping humane groups, individual people, and entire communities to set up spay/neuter, shelter, foster, and adoption programs in their own neighborhoods, cities, and states.

The work of Best Friends is supported entirely through the donations of our members. Through the generous hearts and hands of people like you, we can ensure that animals who come into the care of Best Friends will never again be alone, hungry, sick, afraid, or in pain.

Thank you for being part of this work of love.

Best Friends Animal Society  
Kanab, UT 84741-5000  
435-644-2001  
[www.bestfriends.org](http://www.bestfriends.org)

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**About the author:** David Ortiz is the media relations manager for the Best Friends' No More Homeless Pets campaign. He works with regional community program managers to coordinate publicity for the nationwide campaign.

# Making It Newsworthy

**T**he success of your humane organization depends in part on effective relations with the media. To promote adoptions, encourage spay/neuter, raise the public’s awareness of animal welfare issues, and raise funds, you need to spread the word about what you’re doing and why you’re doing it. In this publication, I’ll give you some tips for working effectively with the media; some specifics on writing news releases, PSAs, letters to the editor and newspaper columns; and some ideas for dealing with interviews.

First, let’s talk about how to make your story “newsworthy.” Sometimes reporters will not cover a story because they can’t find a strong news angle (called a hook). So, when you approach a media outlet with a story idea, think in terms of making it newsworthy. Some characteristics of newsworthy stories are:

- **Timeliness.** The media is interested in what’s happening today or in the future, not what happened yesterday.
- **Proximity.** The closer the event is to the media source, the more likely they will consider it news.
- **Prominence.** If well-known local people are involved, such as the mayor or city council members, the media may respond more quickly.
- **Originality.** If you are doing something for the first time, the media is more likely to respond; they get tired of the same old recycled event.
- **Importance.** If many people will be affected or interested, the media will consider it a stronger story.
- **A compelling focus.** A story with some drama is often considered newsworthy – for example, a cat or dog who was rescued at the last minute or who went from terrible living conditions to a loving home.

Here are some other tips to help you make your stories newsworthy:

- If you want to promote a national day or event (like National Homeless Animals’ Day), focus on the local angle. What’s happening in your community?
- Use interesting visuals during the event, such as big colorful signs and props, which increases photo opportunities to accompany your story.
- Announce your event in conjunction with the release of local statistics (e.g., a decrease in the number of animals euthanized, an increase in adoptions).
- Look for other milestones. Will your community or organization be carrying out its 500<sup>th</sup> spay/neuter surgery this year? Will 1,000 animal lives be saved thanks to your event?
- Be creative – try to think of fun themes or concepts for your events. For example, Strut Your Mutt, a very popular dog-walk event held to raise funds for No More Homeless Pets in Utah, has garnered a lot of media attention over the years.
- Deliver some good news for your community. For example, calculate how much money your community will save because of the animals who will be spayed or neutered.



# Writing a News Release

**A** news or press release is a short announcement of a newsworthy event. You send press releases to newspapers, magazines, TV and radio stations, and Internet sites to interest them in doing a story. Editors and news directors receive many releases every day; to grab their attention, your news release must look professional and present the facts in a concise and compelling way.

First, develop a template for your news release. Using a template lets you produce releases efficiently, since the basic format is already set up.

Here are some tips for formatting a news release:

- Include your logo at the top of the page, but keep it simple and don't let it take up too much of the page. Editors and news directors are interested in knowing quickly who you are and then getting to the lead sentence.
- Put contact information at the top of the page and make sure the media contact is available at the phone number and e-mail address provided.
- Type your release using a basic font: Times Roman, 12 point size, and regular font (instead of bold or italic) is a good choice.
- Use single-spaced text and indent five spaces to begin new paragraphs.
- Use the standard order (time, date, place) when giving the details about an event. For example: 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., Friday, June 4, at the Radisson Building. Don't use zeros for times (use 11 a.m., not 11:00 a.m.) and don't use letters after numbered dates (August 22, not August 22<sup>nd</sup>).
- Keep it to one page if at all possible.

Here are some tips for writing a news release:

- Write a concise, catchy headline that summarizes the story. It should be written in the style of a newspaper headline, using active verbs – for example, “Art that speaks for homeless pets.”
- Your lead sentence should describe the event, and why it's newsworthy.
- The body of the release should contain the all-important facts: who, what, when, where and why.
- Information on sponsors should be at the end.
- The final paragraph should describe your group and summarize your organization's mission.
- Proofread the release carefully for grammar and spelling, and always make certain that all the information in the release is accurate before you send it.

There's a sample news release on the next page.





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## NEWS RELEASE

### **Contact for more information:**

Dave Ortiz  
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### **No More Homeless Pets advocates gather in Cincinnati**

Sept. 20, 2004 – Cincinnati will play host in October to over 400 animal welfare advocates from across the country, including some of the nation’s foremost experts in the rapidly growing movement to create no-kill communities.

The conference will be held at the Holiday Inn Cincinnati–Eastgate on October 22–24 and is sponsored by Best Friends Animal Society, leader of the national No More Homeless Pets campaign.

“There’s a growing movement across the country to bring an end to the killing of homeless pets,” said Michael Mountain, president of Best Friends. “This conference will bring people together from all over the country who want to help achieve this goal.”

Experts from Best Friends and other organizations in the animal welfare field will discuss a variety of topics, including how to increase adoptions, establish spay/neuter programs, and implement innovative humane solutions to managing feral cats. Other topics include how to raise funds, and how to build and increase membership.

Panel discussions, workshops and optional seminars also will provide how-to information on community outreach strategies, volunteer recruitment, media relations, and coping with “burn-out.”

Meet the people who are creating new hope for homeless pets and exploring strategies to develop no-kill communities. Whether you are an animal welfare professional or an individual who cares about animals, you will get practical information, inspiration, and advice from people around the country who are creating life-saving change for the animals.

“We are very excited about the No More Homeless Pets conference coming to Cincinnati. It will help energize our community to hear about other successful programs happening throughout the country,” said Linda Richardson of Cincinnati’s United Coalition for Animals. “It’s a terrific opportunity to connect with hundreds of like-minded and compassionate people.”

For registration information and a schedule of events at the conference, visit the Best Friends website at [www.bestfriends.org/nomorehomelesspets/conference\\_oct04.cfm](http://www.bestfriends.org/nomorehomelesspets/conference_oct04.cfm). You can also call (435) 644-2001, ext. 255, to register.

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# Writing a Public Service Announcement

**P**ublic service announcements (PSAs) are short notices, lasting anywhere from 10 to 60 seconds, that are aired on radio and TV stations prepared to provide information to the public. PSAs are used by organizations to publicize community events, to assist in fundraising efforts, and to inform and influence public opinion.

Most radio and TV stations look for local causes to promote in the PSAs that they air. PSAs must contain information that is beneficial to the community and should not include controversial or self-serving material. Check with the program directors at your local radio and TV stations for their guidelines about content and formatting. You should submit your announcement at least 10 days in advance of the time you would like it aired.

The standard lengths for PSAs are:

- 10 seconds (25 to 30 words)
- 20 seconds (45 to 50 words)
- 30 seconds (60 to 75 words)
- 60 seconds (120 to 150 words)

Here are some tips for formatting a PSA:

- Use your organization's letterhead and put in a contact name and telephone number.
- Triple space the entire PSA so that it can be read easily. Use Times Roman, 14 or 16 point size, regular font. Indent all paragraphs.
- As with news releases, use the standard order (time, date, place) when giving the details about an event. For example: 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., Friday, June 4, at the Radisson Building.
- Keep the PSA to one sheet.

Here are some tips for writing a PSA:

- Include all the facts: who, what, when, where and why. Be sure to give specific starting and ending dates.
- Stick to the facts. Avoid superlatives, overly enthusiastic text, and acronyms or nicknames the general public may not be familiar with.

There's a sample 30-second PSA on the next page.

## Following Up

After sending a news release or a PSA, call the news desk after a few days to ask if they received the release and to remind them that you are planning a newsworthy event. Say something like this: "Hello, I'm calling to remind you that People for Animals will be holding a spay/neuter clinic tomorrow at 11 a.m. at the Peaceable Kingdom Animal Shelter at 1234 Main Street. Our contact number is 123-4567 if you need more information. We sent a release to your organization a few days ago."

If the release was sent to an individual reporter, call afterwards to see if the reporter received it. If not, send it again. If you talk to the reporter, let him/her know you are available to answer questions. Be persistent, but not bothersome. If you leave a message and the reporter doesn't call back, do not keep calling. Assume your message was received, but other stories are taking priority.

If you can, try to establish personal contacts at your local media outlets. This gets your organization's name and you out there as an animal welfare resource, available to provide future expertise or comment on animal issues that arise in your community.



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## **PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT**

October 15, 2003

Contact: Dave Ortiz  
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### **No More Homeless Pets Conference comes to Philadelphia Oct. 24–26**

The sixth No More Homeless Pets Conference will be held Friday, October 24, through Sunday, October 26, at the Radisson Valley Forge in King of Prussia.

Everyone concerned about homeless pets and how to find good homes for them is invited to attend this conference.

It is sponsored by Best Friends Animal Society.

For more information call 435-644-3965, ext. 4230, or visit [www.bestfriends.org](http://www.bestfriends.org).

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# Writing a Letter to the Editor

**W**riting a letter to the editor of a local newspaper is one of the most effective (and least expensive) ways to educate people about the work your organization is doing. Letters-to-the-editor sections are widely read, so you are sure to reach a large number of people to whom you might not otherwise have access.

Here are some tips for getting a letter to the editor published:

- Keep your letter short, no more than 300 words. Check with the newspaper, since the maximum number of words allowed varies. Three hundred words is the maximum most papers or magazines will publish without cutting.
- Write concise sentences and stick to one issue – don't ramble or rant.
- Look at other letters the newspaper has published to get an idea of what makes it into print.
- The letter should be timely. If you are responding to something already published, send your letter in no more than three or four days after the article you're responding to has appeared.
- Don't just send your letter to the biggest paper in town. Sometimes, the smaller the paper, the better chance you have of getting your letter printed.
- If you want to send your letter by e-mail, check with the newspapers to find out their policy.

Here's how to structure your letter:

- Address your letter to "Dear Editor."
- Make the first sentence catchy, so it will grab the reader's attention.
- State the name of your organization and the purpose of the letter.

- Convey some brief background about the problem.
- State your opinion about the problem, backed by relevant and accurate statistics from a reputable source.
- Tell your readers what action they should take (if appropriate).
- Sign your letter and include your home and work telephone numbers. Some papers will want to verify that you wrote it.

There's a sample letter to the editor on the next page.







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To the editor,

I am writing in regard to the article, “Time running out for feral cats in Byram,” July 13, 2004, which concerns feral cats and Byram Township Council’s plans to trap and euthanize those not adopted.

Trap/neuter/return (TNR) is a humane low-cost process that will keep your community free of the problems associated with free-roaming cats.

TNR has been proven to reduce public health risks, citizen complaints, and municipal expenditures. The cats are trapped, neutered and vaccinated by veterinarians, and returned to their colony to be cared for by volunteer caregivers. Colony population naturally declines.

The average cost to trap and kill a cat is \$75 to \$125, while trap/neuter/return averages \$50 per cat.

Feral cats are not candidates for adoption – they will be killed if trapped and taken to shelters. The current/proposed policy means certain death for these cats at taxpayer expense. Once these cats are removed, a “vacuum” effect is created and the problem will start again when new cats will move in. Taxpayers’ money is wasted with a trap and kill program. TNR is an effective investment in a true feral cat management program which will have positive long-term results when implemented effectively.

To get more facts on feral cats and humane, cost-effective management, please visit the Best Friends website at [www.bestfriends.org](http://www.bestfriends.org) and the Alley Cat Allies website at [www.alleycat.org](http://www.alleycat.org).

Sincerely,

Beth Mersten  
Northeast Community Program Manager  
Best Friends Animal Society

# Writing an Opinion/Editorial Piece

Instead of writing a letter to the editor, you may want to write an opinion or editorial (op-ed) piece for the local paper. Op-eds are longer articles of 500 to 1,000 words that summarize an issue, develop an argument, and propose a solution. Check with the newspaper, since the maximum number of words allowed varies. Though op-eds can usually be longer than letters to the editor, you should still write as concisely as possible and stick to one issue.

As with letters to the editor, review the op-ed pieces in your local paper to get a sense of what the paper publishes. Send the article to the editorial page editor with a cover letter explaining why you feel it should be printed, or give them a call. The op-ed piece has a better chance of getting printed if signed by someone who has a direct link to the cause, such as a community program manager or director of a humane organization.

Here's an example of an op-ed piece.

## Sample Op-Ed Piece

Op-ed for Examiner Newspaper Group (Houston, Texas) (865 words)

By Kathi McDermott, Community Program Manager, Best Friends Animal Society

There are so many issues in the United States that seem insurmountable; it is good to know there is one national problem on its way to being solved. All across the country, people are doing what they can individually and in groups to bring about the day when there are no more homeless pets.

Animal overpopulation is certainly a serious problem in our country; however, great strides are being made to end animal homelessness through aggressive spay/neuter programs, innovative adoption programs, and education.

Just 20 years ago, 17 million animals a year were

being killed in our nation's animal shelters. Today, that number is estimated to be between four and five million. The decline is due to improved accessibility to and promotion of spay/neuter, resulting in a substantial decrease in the number of animals needing homes. More people are also adopting from shelters and rescue groups, rather than purchasing intentionally bred animals. Also important are the programs targeting spay/neuter for feral and free-roaming cats. These programs have contributed substantially to the decreased number of cats and kittens entering shelters.

This remarkable grassroots movement is growing rapidly and the number of success stories just keeps mounting. Here are some examples from across the country to consider:

- New Hampshire instituted a statewide spay/neuter program in 1994, resulting in the lowest statewide euthanasia rate in the country.
- In San Diego, the number of adoptable animals being killed in shelters has dropped to almost zero.
- Since Robin Starr became the director of the SPCA in Richmond, Virginia, the organization has revamped their entire approach to animal control.
- Through the Mayor's Alliance for New York City's Animals, over 70 animal welfare organizations are working together to save lives.
- In Ithaca, New York, Nathan Winograd took over leadership of the SPCA and county animal control, and stopped the killing of healthy homeless pets overnight.
- Mike Arms's Home 4 the Holidays campaign resulted in 263,000 adoptions worldwide during the 2003 holiday season.
- The No More Homeless Pets in Utah campaign, now in its fourth year, is on target to bring an end to the killing of healthy homeless pets in Utah by the year 2005.

Of course, it is a tragedy when even one animal is killed for lack of space. Best Friends Animal Society's No More Homeless Pets campaign was launched to address the problem at the national level. The No More Homeless Pets campaign includes several components:

- Our website includes resources for both organizations and individuals, information on model programs across the country, and weekly news highlighting developments around the nation.
- The No More Homeless Pets Forum is an online weekly "workshop," featuring a different topic each week, with a guest expert answering forum members' questions about that topic.
- Best Friends hosts two No More Homeless Pets conferences each year that focus on creating no-kill communities.
- The No More Homeless Pets team consults with grassroots organizations and individuals all around the country to create lifesaving programs in their own communities.
- The Best Friends Network consists of thousands of individuals and organizations across the country who respond to requests for help within their own communities.

We are encouraged by the number of individuals and grassroots organizations who have embraced the No More Homeless Pets philosophy. Humane societies, animal care and control agencies, veterinarians, and city officials are joining forces to spread awareness and garner public support in their communities.

No More Homeless Pets can be a reality in any community, when that community embraces the goal of saving lives. People in the Houston area can participate in this national movement in a variety of ways:

- Always spay or neuter your pets as soon as they become part of your family; better yet, don't bring them home until they have been sterilized. Very often, "oops" litters of kittens and puppies are born when people put spay/neuter on their "to do" list. Encourage other people to spay/neuter their pets as well. If you want the kids to experience the joys of birth and puppies or kittens, consider fostering expectant cats or dogs for your local shelter.
- Always adopt your pets from shelters or rescue groups instead of buying from pet stores or breeders. In addition to finding a loving companion, you will have the satisfaction of knowing you saved a life. Many animals in shelters are mixed breeds, which are often healthier animals and make great pets. But if you have your heart set on a purebred dog or cat, keep in mind that about 25 percent of the animals who end up in shelters are purebreds. Breed-rescue groups can also be a great source for purebred critters that need a home.
- Volunteer for and support your local shelter, rescue group, spay/neuter or feral cat programs. Animal welfare organizations are always in need of volunteer help and donations, including donations of items such as pet food, toys, and bedding.

For more information on how you can get involved in helping to save lives in your community, contact your local shelter. For more information on Best Friends Animal Society and the No More Homeless Pets movement, please visit [www.bestfriends.org](http://www.bestfriends.org).

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# Writing a Guest Column

**W**riting a weekly or monthly guest column for a local newspaper or community magazine is another way to let people in your community know about the work you are doing. It's a way to have your voice heard on a regular basis and to have people in your community associate you with animal welfare. You can alert friends and neighbors to a condition, situation or issue that's important to you.

Guest columns are usually about a variety of topics, but many newspapers or magazines will feature a regular guest column focusing on a particular subject, such as animal welfare. For these kinds of columns, editors want someone who has expertise or knowledge on the subject.

Read guest columnists in your local publications to see how they write. Sometimes the subjects are serious, but often the writer is sharing a memory or a piece of history as a means of self-expression. Your subjects could range from pet care tips to community-related animal events to stories about an adopted dog or cat that found a loving home.

Many guest columns in small communities are "chatty," like having a conversation with your next-door neighbor. Humor is also an essential element of many guest columns.

To get started, speak to the editor of your local newspaper or magazine about submitting a guest column on a regular basis on issues related to animal welfare. Have a couple of sample columns for him to review – one serious and one humorous.

Be prepared with ideas for other columns. Editors want to know that you can write on one main topic but from different viewpoints, including personal experiences you have had with animals. Some editors may give you a trial run, to make sure that you will submit your column on time and that you can write from different perspectives.

If you do commit to a regular column, be prepared to do the writing and stick to deadlines.

Here's a sample guest column:

## Liberty & Justice for All!

By Eric Porter

What's worse than being stuck on the freeway? Being a dog stuck on the median of the freeway with traffic zipping by in both directions.

It was July 4th, and a little dog, now named Liberty, was huddled against a median guard rail on the I-15 coming into Las Vegas. With traffic racing by in both directions round the clock, there was only one way he could have gotten there: he'd been dumped out of someone's car.



Luckily, the dog just stood, frozen, rather than trying to brave the traffic and make a run for it. And eventually a car stopped. The man, who lives in Vegas, pulled off onto the shoulder, then darted through the traffic to the median. The terrified dog didn't try to run away; he just stood there shaking. The man grabbed him, picked him up, and then darted back through all the traffic with the dog in his arms. (Kids, don't try this!)

Then together they headed for a Las Vegas PetCo, where Best Friends holds regular adoption days,

and asked if we could help. We brought the handsome, blue-eyed boy back to the sanctuary, where he was named Liberty in honor of his Independence Day rescue.

But what's Liberty without Justice? This kitten was spotted sitting next to a snake-infested canal



in Florida. (Water moccasins – very poisonous!) She's got beautiful blue eyes, too – but she's completely blind. And when she went to the vet, she tested positive for FIV, a condition that compromises her immune system and makes it difficult for her to be around other cats and places where she might pick up passing infections.

So Cara and Philip Rose, the couple who rescued her, called Best Friends, and Justice, as she is now known, is currently at the sanctuary, living with other cats who need the same special care that she does. This loving, intelligent girl will be ready soon for life as an inside kitty with the right family.

And the Roses, meanwhile, will continue to take in cats they are able to place. "It's a labor of love," Philip told us. "It recharges us."

Incidentally, this same time last year, we took in three puppies who had been found in a cardboard box at the side of a dirt road near Tuba City. The man who picked them up called them Liberty, Justice, and Freedom.

# Dealing with Interviews

## Dealing with Print Media Interviews

**S**ending out a news release is the first step toward getting a story published about your organization and its activities. The next step is for a reporter to call and request an interview. The goal of media interviews is to publicize the work being done by your organization and to establish working relationships with local media and individual reporters.

If a reporter calls requesting an interview, call back as soon as possible, since reporters are usually working on a deadline. When you talk to the reporter, find out the deadline and ask for the subject of the story. Usually it will be about a release you sent out, but sometimes a reporter may want you to comment on an animal issue in the news.

Don't let yourself be ambushed by the media. If a reporter shows up or calls at a time when you are unprepared, reschedule the interview (keeping the deadline in mind) so you can get your facts together.

Besides knowing your facts, you can prepare for interviews by developing concise answers to a few key questions, such as:

- What is the purpose of your organization's work? Why is it important?
- What made you personally interested in this field?
- What makes your organization's contribution unique?
- Who will benefit and how?
- What is your main objective?
- If you could make only two points with this story, what would they be?

### Before the interview:

- Think of two or three main points you would like to make about your subject.

- Gather facts, figures and anecdotes to support your points.
- Anticipate questions the reporter might ask and have responses ready.
- To help the reporter minimize errors, have printed materials to support your information whenever possible. If time allows, offer to fax or e-mail the printed information to the reporter in advance of the interview.
- Be aware that reporters' schedules are determined by the "breaking" news of the day. Do not be offended if an interview gets canceled or rescheduled because a more urgent story arises.

### During the interview:

- Keep your statements clear and concise. Avoid jargon and technical language.
- Stick to your two or three main points. Try not to go off on tangents.
- Speak in complete thoughts. The reporter's question may be edited out and your response should stand on its own.
- If you do not understand a question, ask for clarification rather than talking around it. If you do not have the answer, say so. If possible, tell the reporter where to find the answer.
- Never say, "No comment." If you cannot or do not choose to answer, explain briefly. For example, "I don't have enough information about that, but I will get back to you." Or "I'm really not an expert on that."
- Avoid saying things off the record. Reporters may or may not honor this, and it annoys them. If you don't want to read it in print, you had better not say it.
- Don't let reporters put words in your mouth.
- Observe the five C's: Speak with conviction

in a conversational manner while retaining your composure. Be confident – you are the expert. Tell colorful stories and anecdotes that illustrate your points. We all have great animal stories!

## Dealing with TV and Radio Interviews

Successful television and radio interviews don't just happen. There is always careful planning involved. First, find out as much as you can about the program on which you are being asked to appear. Get the answers to these questions:

- Is the program live or prerecorded?
- Why has the program staff chosen this particular topic and what angle are they taking?
- What are they expecting from you? What general questions will you be asked and how long will the interview be?
- Who's the audience? Think about points you could make that would be useful and relevant to the audience.

Think about possible sound bites that might come out of the interview. As we all know, a sound bite is a short phrase taken from an interview. The phrase stands out in the audience's memory and thus becomes the "taste" or "bite" that best represents the entire "meal" of the larger message or conversation. "There's no excuse for animal abuse" is an example of a sound bite.

Here are some others:

- "Shelter workers are forced to kill one cat or dog every six and a half seconds. That's about 5 million every year."
- "It costs U.S. taxpayers over \$1 billion a year to round up, house, kill and dispose of homeless animals. What's just as bad is the cost in misery to the animals themselves."

- "Spaying and neutering is good for you, your pet and your community."

For better or worse, sound bites are a natural consequence of people placing ever-greater emphasis on quickly summarizing ever-increasing amounts of information in their lives. In television, radio and even print media, sound bites have become a staple, so it's important to realize that in any interview, the audience is going to look for sound bites.

### Before the interview:

- Study the issue in depth.
- Practice being interviewed.
- Anticipate difficult questions and plan your answers.
- Memorize easily understood facts and anecdotes.
- Be ready with two or three key points to emphasize.
- Watch the program to get an idea of the interview style.

### During the interview:

- If it's a TV interview, look at the reporter and not at the camera. If you are uncertain where to look, ask.
- In front of radio or TV microphones, stay still and avoid sitting in a chair that rocks or spins.
- Be aware of and avoid nervous habits, such as pen tapping. In a TV interview, don't fidget or touch your face or hair.
- Pause briefly before answering questions. It makes for a cleaner sound bite and makes you look more thoughtful.
- Avoid frowning if you're asked a challenging question. If it's a humorous question, try to smile naturally; if it's a serious question, try to look thoughtful.

- If you lean forward (15 degrees) into the camera, any double chin will disappear. You will appear to have a stronger jaw line.
- Don't drop the volume at the end of a sentence. This is common in regular conversation, but when speaking on TV, it's harder to hear you.

**Here are some tips on dressing for a TV interview:**

- Avoid jackets or suits with close checked or herringbone patterns. The camera cannot always cope with intricate patterns, so viewers get an unclear look. The same applies to closely striped shirts in sharply contrasting colors.
- Men should avoid very dark suits, particularly in combination with white shirts, which can drain color from the face. Pastel-colored shirts are more flattering.
- Women should go for the unfussy look. Boldly patterned scarves and large pieces of jewelry can be distracting. For jackets and suits, fairly neutral colors work best. Green or blue usually show up well.
- If possible, look in a mirror just before going on camera. The reporter may not tell you if your collar is folded over or your hair is out of place.

In television or radio interviews, you should have your responses prepared – not necessarily memorized, but ready to roll off your tongue. You don't want to be seen as struggling for words.

Generally, you won't be given a list of questions that you'll be asked, because the interviewer doesn't want the interview to sound rehearsed. But, you'll probably know what the topics, or "talking points," will be. When the interview is set up, the interviewer will ask what topics you want to cover, such as the importance of spay/neuter, upcoming events your group is putting on, and statistics on how many animals have been saved.



The way you prepare is to get your topics and then practice some answers (don't memorize!) in a mock interview with a friend. Try to conduct the interview as a conversation. That way, it sounds more relaxed and less mechanical. Practice answering questions in complete sentences, rather than in fits and starts. In everyday life, many of us speak in disjointed phrases, using jargon and short-cuts. In interviews, you should speak in complete, grammatically correct sentences. For example: Say "I agree, there is a growing feral cat population in Phoenix," instead of "Oh, yeah, if you see all those wild cats in the street – just too many of them – people need to do something."

It might help to imagine that you are chatting with someone who is intelligent but who just doesn't know much about the subject. Try to explain what your organization is doing in plain English.



# Resources



## Websites

The following websites contain practical information on developing effective media relations:

Act Up, the AIDS activist group, has a section called “Media Training” on their website:

<http://www.actupny.org/reports/Media%20Training.html>

The Economic & Social Research Council has an online communications toolkit that contains a helpful section called “Media Relations.”

<http://www.esrc.ac.uk/commstoolkit/media/training.asp>

## Books

The following publications are useful for learning how to work with the media:

*Media Training 101: A Guide to Meeting the Press*  
by Sally Stewart

*The Public Relations Handbook*  
by Alison Theaker

*Soundbites: A Business Guide to Working with the Media*  
by Kathy Kerchner