



HOW TO ENGAGE WITH THE MEDIA

Level 3: Advanced activist skills

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AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL





This just in...

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BEFORE WE BEGIN

If you haven't completed our modules on [fundamental activist skills](#), we recommend reading these first. In particular our module on Effective Communications.

If you have any questions please get in touch with us at communityorganising@amnesty.org.au.



Activists at One Day in Fremantle 2017 © Amnesty International

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to our module on media engagement. In this module you'll gain an understanding of how our movement works with the media in a strategic way. To look for the right opportunities and channels to get our message to the community. How you can build relationships with local media to promote your activism. Also some of the core skills you'll need, like writing effective media releases.

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cluding here on Coast, began and campaigning for ordered LGBTQI s defenders Ma- and Zak Kosto- Franco was city of the Municipal

Chamber of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. A black bisexual woman, human rights defender and young mother who grew up in the favelas, Marielle completed her masters degree and went on to become a member of Rio de Janeiro's State Human Rights Commission in 2006.

After being elected to public office in 2016, Marielle was appointed president of the Women Commission and backed many bills relating to women's rights.

One of the first bills she put forward was to recognise IDAHOBIT in Rio de Janeiro's official calendar. Marielle dedicated her life to supporting her community and advancing the rights of women and LGBTQI people, but because of her political activism, she was shot dead in a targeted drive-by shooting on March 14 last year.

Available information reveals that some level of participation of state agents was



FIGHT FOR CHANGE: William Ramsay, Lauren Berlyn, Emily Pegler, Asrar Ismail and Nina Ashfield-Crook, members of Amnesty Sunshine Coast and Amnesty University of the Sunshine Coast action groups. Photo: Contributed

necessary for this carefully planned crime to happen.

Zak Kostopoulos was a queer activist in Greece who died on

September 21 last year following a vicious assault at a jewellery store in downtown Athens.

Also known by his drag stage name Zackie Oh, he was a tireless defender of the rights of LGBTQI people and HIV-

positive people.

Zak was brutally kicked on the head, neck and other parts of his body by two men in the

shop, as well as police officers who violently handcuffed him while injured and unconscious.

Forensic reports show Zak died from the numerous injuries he sustained.

Zak's tragic death sparked outrage across Europe and the initial reporting of the case revealed the deep prejudice that exists in parts of society.

Stigmatising remarks and false reports circulated by media that detracted from the brutal attack were simply not supported by the forensic evidence.

This stigma and discrimination must not be tolerated. Together, we can get justice for Zak, Marielle and their loved ones.

Amnesty International supporters are uniting to call on the Brazilian authorities to ensure a thorough investigation and justice for Marielle, protection for her family and witnesses to the crime, and a public condemnation of

threats and attacks against human rights defenders.

Together we are also calling on the Greek authorities to take all necessary steps to ensure the perpetrators of the attack against Zak are held to account in fair trial proceedings, that justice is delivered in the wake of his death, and that investigations must look into whether hate, discrimination or any other prejudice motivated the attack.

Amnesty International believes in a world where people everywhere stand against injustice anywhere. Our action groups advocate for the human rights of people at home and abroad, to help create a world where human rights are universal. To join Amnesty Sunshine Coast in standing up for justice and protection, head to our Facebook page to sign the online petitions and sign up to our group at www.facebook.com/amnestyinternational.sunshinecoast/

Article written by activists in Sunshine Coast Daily in 2019

Why is it important for us to engage the media?

Before we get into how to work with the media we should first discuss why it's important. Regardless of who you are, you get your information from somewhere. Something influences your views, beliefs and opinions.

Some examples include: Television, radio, online, newspapers, magazines or via conversation with others. We choose our sources based on what is important to us. Some prefer a focus on local news over what's happening around the world. Some pay attention to the level of research, fact based reporting or framing of the issues we care about. We also might care more about their reputation or trustworthiness as well. It could also be specific media personalities that get our attention. Established media channels build audiences based on what they think that audience values.

When we want to get our message out to a wide audience it can be hard to do on our own. Amnesty has many supporters, but to go beyond that audience we have to reach them via other channels. Sometimes that will involve working with the media to get our message out there. Established media channels have the benefit of dedicated audiences they've built over time. If you find out where your chosen audience gets their info, then you have a good chance of reaching them.

If you're organising an event there's only so far mailing lists and paid promotion can take you. But if you get your local media and websites to strengthen your promotions, then you have a better chance of success. You can also use these to grow the movement and raise awareness about human rights issues. There are many good reasons to work with the media. We have so many options for promotion out there, why not use them all?

In a broader context, engaging with the media is very important for Amnesty. We use it to reach and influence large numbers of people and to shift political opinion. Getting our messaging and brand into the media builds support for our campaigns. It increases our power and helps influence decision makers to create change.

Amnesty International Australia's media team usually works with national and metro media. This is what there is capacity for them to achieve. The huge number of regional media sources makes it hard to have relationships at a national level. Activists are in a unique position to fill this gap and build those local relationships.

Local media have an appetite for stories which help paint a picture of a local community. Local activists can take advantage of this need for local content and build a mutually beneficial relationship. The best part is that we all can (and should) do it. This module won't turn you into a media expert, but it will give you the knowledge to get started.

When is it a good time to contact the media and what to contact them about?

Knowing the right time to get in touch with the media depends on what you want them to report on. If you want to comment on a human rights issue that is receiving a lot of attention then you need to get in there fast. Because that attention will fade, the longer you wait the less chance you have of getting in.

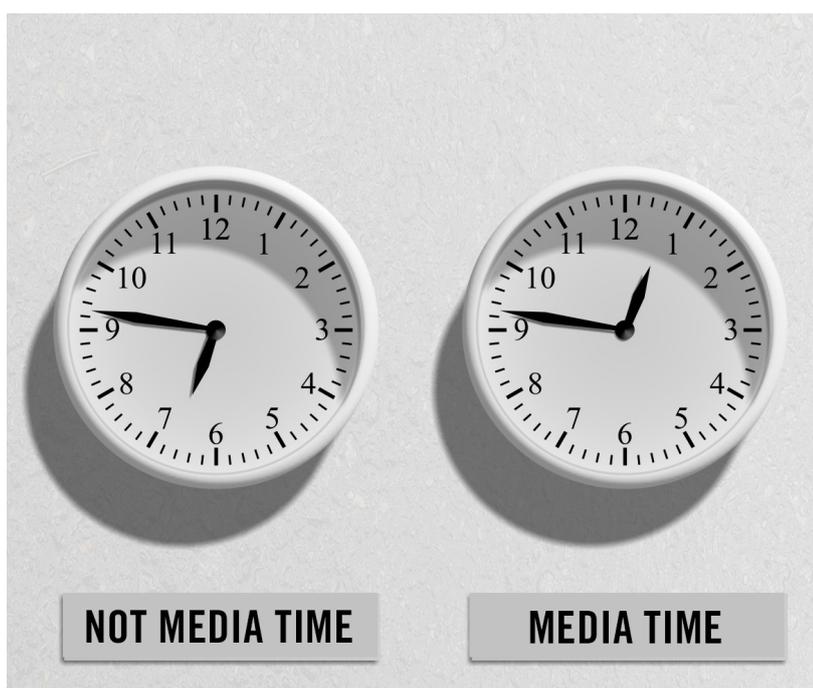
Be sure to plan ahead and to make sure you prepare yourself. Be mindful of deadlines and program times. For example, if you're contacting a broadcaster, make sure you don't do it when their show is on air. If you're contacting a print or online journalist, make sure you find out when their deadlines are. This is so you don't bother them when they don't have time to chat. A simple "is now a good time to talk" is a good way to start.

When you contact the media, think about what makes your story newsworthy? Journalists are selling stories so your angle needs to have something timely. It should also have local or thematic relevance. Will you have a spokesperson confident to talk about the issues presented? What will be the visual component of your story? For example, will you have images available? Can the journalist film your event?

If you're looking to promote your local activism in a general way, you can do that at any time. But, whether you receive that promotion will depend on how engaging your story is. Other factors include whether there is space to include it. Once again, having that relationship with the local media people will be a huge help.

In regards to promoting an event, there's almost always dedicated local event guides out there both online and offline. But, make sure you get this info out as soon as possible so people have more time to find the info. The larger the event, the more promotion time needed.

Your local or thematic activism has a unique angle for particular media publications. If you focus on a specific issue you'll be able to find outlets focused around that issue too. For example if your focus is LGBTQI rights then you can get in touch with media aimed in that community. As mentioned earlier you can also find local media aimed at your regional location or suburb.



Activity: Where does your community get its information? Even in large cities you should have local community print and radio. How about online? Are you able to identify journalists from these that might be sympathetic to our cause? Search their site for general keywords like 'human rights' to see how they've reported on it. Was it in a positive or negative frame? Start building a list of potential contacts you can reach out to.

How to build a relationship with media contacts

Now that you have a better idea about who to contact, let's have a look at how to build relationships with journalists. There's a lot you have to say that will be of interest to local media. You can provide a journalist with relevant, accurate information and human stories. In return they can provide you with a platform to promote your activism to the community.

Before we get into how to build the relationship there's one important thing you have to consider. That's whether that media contact already has a relationship with someone at Amnesty. If it's a local media source and you're one of the few active Amnesty people in town, you're most likely all right. But if it's a national or metro source then they could already be speaking with someone from Amnesty. It's worth double checking this before you get in contact with them. You can get in touch with the media team at media@amnesty.org.au to find out.

Try to first identify a particular media contact that you think may have an interest in human rights. Or at the very least someone that likes to report on what is happening in the community. Get their contact details and invite them out for a coffee. You can talk to them about what you are up to and find out what kind of stories they like. You can also find key bits of info like when deadlines are for submitting stories.

If they don't have time to meet in person then try to build a relationship via email or over the phone. Remember to keep it professional at all times. You wouldn't want a casual remark taken out of context and used in the media.

If you're not sure about a particular contact that's okay. They should have general public contact details you can use. Inquire about who the best person to speak with would be. Once you have reached out to a media outlet, they might start getting in touch with you for a response to human rights issues. Be sure to respond to calls and emails in a timely fashion. You are building trust and showing that you respect their time. This is what having a mutual relationship with them is all about.

It might not be only you getting in touch with them for promotion. Expect that they may get in touch with you as well for content. Before you do respond though make sure you know what Amnesty's position is on the issue. Get in touch with the Amnesty media team (media@amnesty.org.au) if you're in any doubt and they can help you with Amnesty's official position on various issues.

That should be enough for you to build those initial relationships. For more on relational meetings check out our guide on that subject. Now let's dive into more details of specific methods of engaging with the media.



Activity: Start putting together a media strategy for your activism over the next few months. Where are there opportunities to reach out to the media? What kind of promotion do you need? When would you need it? When you're ready, start building those relationships.



Media stunt in Darwin

How to write a media release

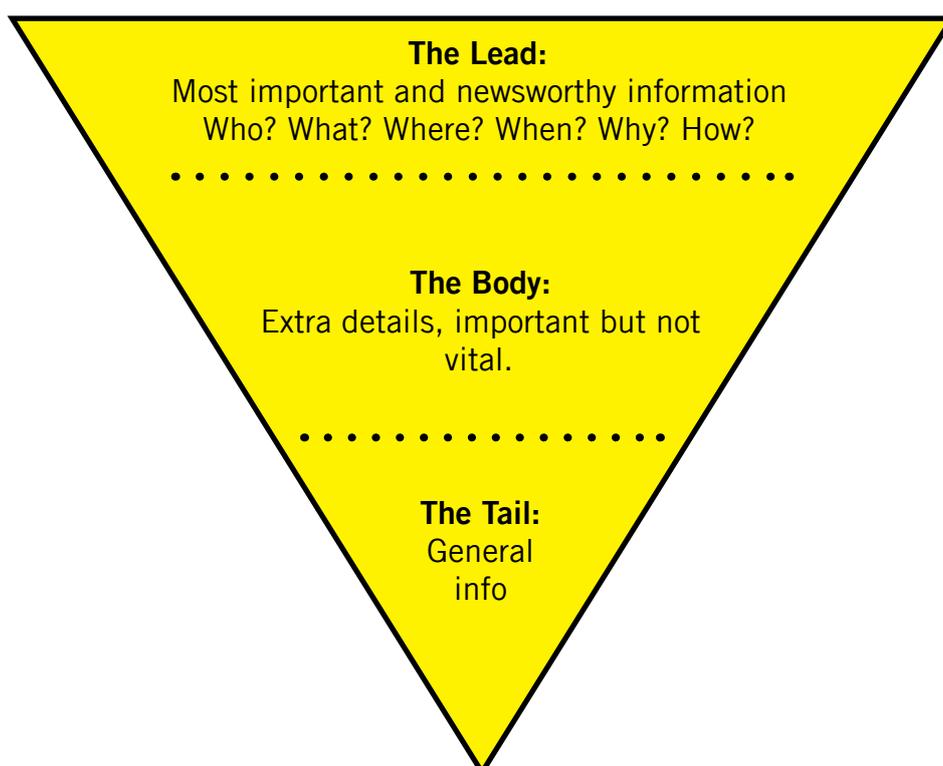
We use media releases for a few reasons. For announcing a news story, to give Amnesty's position on an issue or to promote an event. They are generally the first step when contacting the media.

Local media are keen to cover events about local people. But beware: your media release has about 30 seconds to grab their attention. This is because journalists receive a large number of these every day. They only have a short amount of time to sift through the most interesting stories.

To get their attention:

- 1 Be sure you are aware of deadlines - you don't want to write up a perfect media release and miss the moment. If you send out a release after the issue has lost attention then you're not likely to get any pick up, so get in early.
- 2 Put the most interesting, attention-grabbing information in the first paragraph. Also have an eye catching headline.
- 3 K.I.S.S. – Keep it short and simple. To make sure that they read your story and everyone understands it. Stick to one or two sentences per paragraph and about 25 words per sentence. Be sure to emphasise the local angle and/or why your item is newsworthy. Quotes from an Amnesty figure can be very useful if they fit in.
- 4 Identify the right journalist to send the media release to. But always CC in the general contact email address in case.
- 5 Follow-up by phone to check if they have received the media release.

A journalistic method which is worth understanding is the inverted pyramid. This means the most important info is at the top of the story, and the least important info is at the bottom. Think about what the most and least important details of your issue or event are. Then write them down as a basis for your media release. In the first paragraph you should be able to cover the most important information.





**AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL AUSTRALIA
MEDIA RELEASE**

APRIL 23, 2020

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL SENDS OUT A MEDIA RELEASE

Amnesty International has a new media release to share with the media today. It is important and urgent information, which is why it has been summarised in the form of this media release.

A staff member at Amnesty International said that sending out media releases is a great way to get information to the media in a quick and succinct way.

“We love sending out media releases, because it gives the media everything they need to know,” the staff person said. “Journalists can read these really fast and then work out whether they want to write a story.”

This media release will be sent out soon and the media is invited to get in contact with us to discuss it further.

ENDS

INTERVIEW AND FILMING OPPORTUNITY

WHEN: *Time, date (If an event)*

WHERE: *Address, Google Maps reference (If an event)*

CONTACT: *Name, email address, phone number*

This is an example of what a media release generally looks like. Please feel free to use it as a template.

For other examples check out the news section of our website at <https://www.amnesty.org.au/types/news/>



Activity: Write a practice media release. It could either be about something you have coming up or something you have done in the past. If you want feedback on it please get in touch.



How to write a letter to the editor

The Letters to the Editor page is often the most well-read and talked-about section of a newspaper. Getting a letter published is a good way to explain the need for attention on a particular issue.

Before you start writing your own, read past letters and pay attention to the style. You will soon get a feel for the features and language of the letters they choose for publishing.

Check the guidelines for letters of your target newspaper, including word count. Then deliver your letter according to the details provided by the paper.

Here are some tips we have adapted from [Media Matters: The Complete Guide to Getting Positive Media Attention](#).

- 1 Identify yourself in a clear way, because newspapers will NOT publish anonymous letters. Include an address, email and the organisation you represent - if it's an official position.
- 2 If representing an organisation, identify who might be the best person in the group to sign it. It may not always be the leader. Readers generally relate to personal stories from people affected by the issue itself. So if you can connect the issue back to yourself in a personal way you'll have a greater chance.
- 3 Keep it simple and short. Letters are rarely longer than 200 words so make clarify your point with brevity. Also it might be a good idea to confine yourself to making one or two points only. This often has a greater impact than expressing a long series of ideas.
- 4 Letters that make the best impression have their strongest points at the beginning. The most compelling letters pull the reader in with a startling fact, a visceral description or a strong statement.
- 5 Support your point with relevant facts, if applicable. Data and proof to support your argument should be well sourced and accurate.
- 6 Do not plagiarise. If using other sources, make sure you acknowledge them. Also try to use your own voice and words rather than regurgitating someone else's ideas.
- 7 If seeking public and community action, be clear about what the reader can do to support your cause. Such as attending an event, writing a letter, signing a petition or making a donation.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

EXPERTS BACK AGE CHANGE

Claims that Wagga will be over-run by juvenile delinquents is just fear mongering. The call to raise the age of criminal responsibility (*DA*, October 15) is based on brain science and on the opinion of the experts.

The Law Council of Australia has backed the move, saying if all jurisdictions followed suit it would vastly improve the lot of some of the nation's most vulnerable children, especially Indigenous children. Arthur Moses, President of the Law Council of Australia,

including to promote the best interests of the child. Many children in detention have not been sentenced. There must be greater emphasis on evidence-based alternatives to detention, including intensive rehabilitative and welfare-based responses, justice re-investment projects, early intervention, prevention and community-led programs.
Patricia Burgess, Wagga

Letter to the editor in Daily Advertiser from Wagga Wagga action group

How to engage with others on online media

It's common to have passionate debates over human rights issues online. Contributing to these debates is vital to get our message across. There needs to be a lot of people defending human rights in these spaces to bring more people on board. Given how many places there are to engage in this way, it might be a good idea to only pick a few. You could focus on being a regular commentator at the media sources related by theme or location.

Does your local newspaper or radio station have a presence on social media? Then keep an eye out for when they post anything related to human rights and get your message out there. The quicker you publish your comment, the more people will read it and react. Keep in mind that the discussion can last for days after they post online, so you can take your time.

Here are some hints on how to get your point across:

- Be concise and clear. Don't get into a long argument, try to state your point of view in one short paragraph.
- Be polite and calm. Always be passionate rather than angry, and firm rather than abusive. It's easy to dismiss people who get carried away, no matter how correct their argument is.
- Be factual. Don't get carried away and make things up!
- Be personal. State how this issue affects you on a personal level. What values do you hold that make you passionate about the issue?

There's more tips in our guides on structured conversations and using digital tools for activism. You can check those out on our [Skill Up](#) page.



How to take part in an interview (an introduction)

While not common, you may get a sudden request from a journalist for a comment or interview. Take their details and arrange to call them back. This will allow you to gather your thoughts and create some key messages you'd like to convey. You should never agree to an interview on the spot, unless you are very well prepared or very experienced.

Use this time to prepare. Check that you have the latest information. Find out what Amnesty's current position is on the issue. Look through current news to see if there is any relevant information they may ask you about. Seek advice from Amnesty staff if you need it, but it's good to let us know that the interview is happening anyway.

It is vital to have key messages about your event or the campaign. Think about key messages as the things you'd like the audience to remember from the story they see or hear.

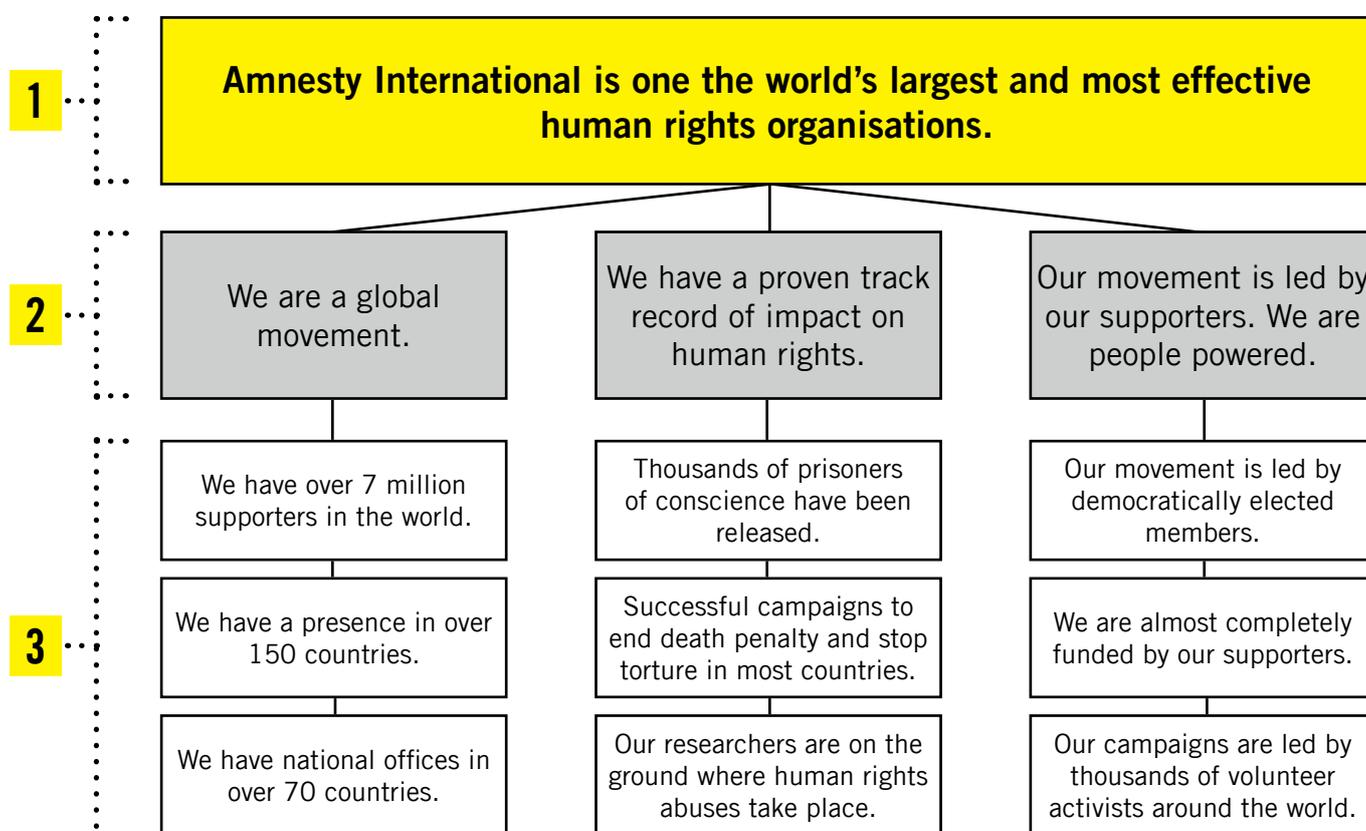
When it comes to key messages here are some things to keep in mind.

- Prepare your message based on what information **you** want to give the audience.
- Who is interviewing you? Who are their audience? What message will be more effective on them?
- Anticipate what questions you may be asked. Think about how you can tailor your answers to bring it back to your message. Don't go off message, stick to your central theme.
- Make your message something easy to remember and quotable.
- Keep it short, you should be able to say your message in about 20 seconds.
- Your message will be an emotional hook to the story. It will allow the audience to connect with you on a personal level.
- To achieve all of this, prepare about 2-3 key message for when you speak to the journalist.

An effective way to structure your message is to use the following format.

1. **Key message** - the overall point you want to get across. This is the equivalent of a headline, the main bit of info you want the audience to know.
2. **Additional points** - More information to strengthen your key message. It's good to have about 3 of these.
3. **Proof** - Evidence and facts to back up your key message and additional points. To be prepared, have about 3 of these for each of your additional points.

Here is an example:



So when you speak to the journalist you would begin with your key message. Then you would move to your first additional point while also providing your proof to back that up. Following that you would move onto your next two additional points in succession. You may not get the chance to give all of this information, so make sure you prioritise the most information first.

If you do an interview, be sure to refer to your key messages and remember there is a purpose to the interview. It is not a friendly chat or a debate, it's an opportunity to tell your story. Your goal is to set the agenda and stay on message. As such be sure you are well prepared, have your key messages in front of you. You want to give them some good quotes and be prepared for tough questions.

In preparation there are a few things you can do, these are things we have already mentioned. Learn about your audience and prepare your key messages. Make sure your message is free from jargon, that any audience could understand what you are saying. Get lots of practice in so you sound confident and will be less nervous.

Arrive early to the interview if in person or are in a quiet space if the interview is taking place over the phone. Answer each question to your satisfaction and then stop. Keep your responses short and concise, don't ramble. You don't need to fill silence and it's not a race to finish the interview. Don't let the interviewer take you off track to topics you aren't prepared for.

You can use bridges and links to get back to your key message, things like:

General

- "The most important thing is..."
- "The bottom line is..."
- "The key thing is..."

In response

- "I agree that's important, but even more critical is..." (Agreement)
- "That's one way to look at it, but our approach is..." (Alternative)
- "There are two key points here, the first is..." (Listing)
- "I think you've been given some incorrect information. The truth of the matter is..." (Correction)
- "I don't have that information on hand, but what I can say is..." (Cannot answer)

We only have the space here for a very basic explanation of doing interviews. This is a skill that needs extensive training on its own. But this should give you some of the fundamentals you need to take part in an interview. Get in touch with us if you need some help to prepare.



Interview for WINNEWS North Queensland



Activity: Role play an interview based on a topic you have a lot of knowledge about. Record it and watch it back. Think about any answers you could have done better and then do it again.

What's next?

That brings us to the end of our guide on how to engage with the media. We hope it has given you more confidence to build relationships with media contacts. Also that you now know how to identify strategic media opportunities. We hope you're excited about putting together media plans to promote your activism.

If you have any questions you can get in touch with us at communityorganising@amnesty.org.au. Thank you for your time!



Visit the Skill Up page for more activist development resources.

www.amnesty.org.au/skill-up/

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