

OVERVIEW

Media Relations/ Spokesperson Training



You want trust, not spin

Clear, authentic communication engages with every audience. They trust it. It's refreshing. And it's what we do.

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1. COURSE CONTENT AND APPROACH	2
2. COURSE AGENDA (ONE-DAY COURSE).....	3
3. COURSE MATERIALS.....	4

1. Course Content and Approach

Course Content and Approach

RMA's course design and bilingual core training materials have evolved over 16 years of numerous national-in-scope standing offers and contracts with government organizations and their leaders. They serve as the basis for discussions with new clients about their particular needs, and have been developed for courses of varying length, ranging from two hours to two days.

Since 2000, in classroom sessions, RMA has offered participants a blend of theory and practical application, with heavy emphasis on the latter.



Each session is based on the collection of file-related information from each participant. This material enables us to assess their skills and knowledge in advance and to build individualized, reality-based messaging and audio and video interview exercises.

After an introduction to the news media, each participant participates in interview preparation exercises and fixed-time audio-recorded and/or on-camera video-recorded mock interviews followed by personalized analysis and feedback. This helps us to equip the participants, or enhance their existing capabilities, with the tools and techniques they need to communicate in a tone and manner appropriate to the target audience.

Training objectives are pursued through a “theory > example > practice > critique” teaching sequence, and our modularized content means that the emphasis and course material can be tailored to focus on the mandate, priorities and concerns of the client organization and the participant who will be representing it. The content typically encompasses:

- what news is and what reporters look for;
- how different media collect and present information in different ways;
- the perceptions and needs of different audiences;
- the elements of a message, and how to prepare and deliver them effectively without sacrificing authenticity and accuracy;
- dealing with critical or sensitive issues;
- preparing for an interview and anticipating the questions;
- dealing with muddled or difficult questions;
- understanding the impact of body language and presentation;
- handling news conferences and technical briefings; and,
- handling aggressive interviewers.



2. Course Agenda (one-day course)

Note that a blended course is available that combines our onDemand learning service with a half-day in-person practice session. All of the same material is covered as the full-day session but it offers additional flexibility in scheduling. See 3. Course Materials for more information or visit www.rmassociates.ca.

9:00 a.m.	Module 1: Introduction Introduction – Objectives/Agenda - Round table - Concerns - Definition of an effective spokesperson
9:15 a.m.	Module 2: Rules of the Road Communications Policy - News is
9:30 a.m.	Module 3: Context Canadians and the news media - Media Landscape
9:45 a.m.	Module 4: Plain Language What is plain language? - Written exercise and review
<i>10:00 a.m.</i>	<i>Break</i>
10:15 p.m.	Module 5: The Audio Interview Audio-recorded exercise and review
11:30 a.m.	Module 6: Messaging Key messages - Written exercise and review
<i>12:15 p.m.</i>	<i>Lunch</i>
1:00 p.m.	Module 6: Messaging <i>continued</i>
1:30 p.m.	Module 7: Message Delivery When the reporter calls - Addressing the question
2:00 p.m.	Module 8: Video Interview Body language - Nervousness - Exercise and review
<i>2:30 p.m.</i>	<i>Break</i>
2:45 p.m.	Module 8: Video Interview <i>continued</i>
4:00 p.m.	Module 9: Summary and Review Review of concerns and evaluation
4:30 p.m.	End

3. Course Materials


RMA's bilingual course materials include:

- the participants' reference manual;
- animated presentation slides;
- RMA's training videos, and
- our online, onDemand service.

Participant Manual (Samples)


The manual is distributed to all participants at the beginning of the course, along with a trainer biography and an evaluation form. The document provides background information that expands on the content presented in the course modules, and contains links to additional web information.

Media Relations / Spokesperson Training




Module 2: Rules of the Road
Prepare for the Medium

News media can be divided into:



Traditional



Community

Within each, each medium has its own needs and expectations of interview subjects regarding news/information-gathering and dissemination. Spokespersons should prepare for the interview in mind the needs and expectations of the medium they are working with.

Inside the traditional media

Broadcast reporters have more deadlines, fewer staff and less room for detail.

A daily newspaper in any major market has a newsroom of about 100 editorial staff (reporters and editors). That's almost ten times as many as a television station in the same market. That television station has roughly three times as many reporters/editors as does the local radio station.

Major market news programs are broadcast between two and four times per day. Typically, a 15-minute news program has a deadline based on the next edition is going to air.

Newspaper reporters are expected to deliver stories that offer context and detail to readers. Television reporters, they can work equally effectively by telephone or in person with subjects and spokespeople.

Most television stations now belong to regional or national chains (see Module # 3). Many also contribute to 24-hour all-news channels. Therefore they face many deadlines during the day.

A typical television news report uses images and movement to create impressions and a sense of drama. TV news viewers typically come away with impressions and ideas rather than content detail.

Many radio stations broadcast two newscasts per hour during the morning and afternoon "drive times", with hourly newscasts the rest of the day. Radio reporters manage more deadlines than their colleagues in traditional media. Radio reporters are better at bringing you news as it happens because they are less encumbered by equipment and technology than are their television counterparts.

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For broadcast stories, the information that the subject is attempting to relay to the audience will be relayed in short, focussed "clips". It is preferable for spokespersons to present their information in 10 to 15 second clips than to have the reporter edit it down for them.

Community media

Community media include weekly/monthly newspapers, non-profit radio stations, community cable channels and specialty publications (newsletters, industry magazines, etc.). Community media have a broad reach and big impact with their relatively small audiences. When dealing with community reporters, ask yourself, "What is the impact of this issue on the audience of this media outlet?"


The national association of the daily and community newspaper industry, Newspapers Canada, reported that in June 2016, there were 1,060 community newspapers in this country. Community newspapers publish almost 20 million copies each week. The majority of circulation is free, accounting for more than 18 million copies weekly. Almost 90% of community newspapers publish in a tabloid format.

Different emphasis

Traditional media tend to emphasize "controversy"

whereas community and web-based media emphasize "relevance".

Use your understanding of news and the media to:



- ⇒ Forecast issues and questions
 - Plan for controversy in daily media
 - Plan for relevance in community media
 - Identify opportunities
- ⇒ Prepare messages/response lines
- ⇒ Prepare one page backgrounders/fact sheets
 - One page or less for broadcasters
 - One page + more info for newspapers
- ⇒ Prepare the spokesperson

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7

Sample Animated Presentation Slides

RMA uses a variety of adult learning-based teaching methods, including presentations, reality-based exercises and instructional video. Our presentation slides are animated and dynamic. Because the detailed information is contained in the Participant Manual, the slides are not heavy with excessive text that tries to convey too much information at once. The slides form the basis for the trainer's comments and the group discussion. Again, the sample slides shown below are from previous projects and could be adapted or modified to meet your needs.

DEFINITION OF AN EFFECTIVE SPOKESPERSON

Using plain language,
the spokesperson delivers
messages
while directly addressing
the question.

ADDRESSING THE QUESTION

Address the question asked

- Audience's support is driven by trust
- Evasiveness \neq trust
- Either:
 - Provide the requested information
 - Say you can't and explain why

In both instances, you are also delivering messages

MESSAGES

Move audiences to your point-of-view by demonstrating:

ACTION

EMPATHY

RATIONALE

SOME INTERVIEW TIPS

- Just before the interview starts ask for the first question
- If on the phone, stand up
- If Skype, webcam at eye level
- Avoid jokes
- Let the reporter fill the silence
- Stay calm with persistent or hostile questioners
- Avoid repeating the negative

Nothing is off the record.

Training Videos

“Reporting the News” is comprised of a series of short training videos are woven throughout the course. The videos were produced by RMA and feature interviews with national and locally-focused reporters talking about various aspects of their work and how they go about their jobs. We hear reporters describe how they see the demands of working with public sector and non-profit organizations.





Online Service

RMA is the first company in Canada to offer online and interactive media relations/spokesperson training courses. Participants complete four online modules followed by a half-day in-person practice session.



The collage illustrates the online training service with several elements:

- Video Clips:** Two video frames are shown. The first features David Reevely, Post Media, with the 'OTTAWA CITIZEN' building in the background. The second features Rachel Gaulin, Radio-Canada, télévision et radio.
- Course Outline:** A screenshot of the 'Media Relations Training' page lists 'Pre-course Modules' to be completed before the in-person session:
 - Module 1: Introduction
 - Module 2: Rules of the Road
 - Module 3: Context
 - Module 4: Plain LanguageIt also includes a 'Questionnaire : Comprendre le fonctionnement des médias' and a 'Quiz: Plain Language True or False'.
- Quiz Interface:** A screenshot of the quiz interface shows a question: 'Do the following reading from the Course Manual' with the answer 'Pages 8 and 9.' Below this is a 'Select one:' section with radio buttons for 'True' and 'False' (marked with a green checkmark), and a 'Check' button.
- Video Call:** A screenshot of a video call between two participants, with a 'Add submission' button overlaid.
- Spokesperson Training:** A video frame shows a woman speaking, with the 'RUTHERFORD MCKAY ASSOCIATES' logo overlaid.