

# MEDIA TRAINING 201: BEST PRACTICES FOR INTERVIEWING

[AUGUST 2021]

## A. CONSIDER MESSAGE SEQUENCING

1. For longer formats, where you have 20-30 minutes or more (podcast, radio show, etc.), or even for standard formats where you have time to prepare, consider following a standard messaging sequence where you lead with a Positive Value, then Identify the Problem, and Provide a Solution. For examples, see AAPF's Messaging Guide.

- \* Start with the **positive or shared value**: You know the opposition is couching this as "racist" or "socialism" or "indoctrination." Pre-empt those points with your own language, which is the point of starting with a Positive Value. Use words like "racial justice," "multiracial democracy," "fairness," "truth," "common sense."
- \* Next, identify the **problem, challenge or threat**: Identify the Problem that threatens your Positive Value. Use phrases like, "well-coordinated disinformation campaign, funded by dark money," or "those who oppose multiracial democracy are seeking to restrict voting, protest, and now ideas..."
- \* End Strong with Your call to action and any ask: Provide a clear solution to the problem you've identified.

*We cannot allow politicians to dumb down public education to satisfy their narrow definition of "patriotic education."*

## B. SELECT A FEW KEY SOUNDBITES

- \* Focus on your top three soundbite sentences you know you want to make.
- \* Consider sequencing them to lead naturally from positive value- to problem- to solution or call to action.
- \* Consider message alignment: line up your answer so it has a consistent, powerful message that can resonate in communities across the country.
- \* You don't have to be a robot, but consistency makes your job easier.
- \* "Answer the question you wish you were asked": reframe initial questions to highlight your preferred response (unless you are doing a pivot from dominant framing, which we will discuss next).

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## C. HOW TO EXECUTE A “PIVOT” FROM THE DOMINANT FRAME

Most of the interviewers you’re likely to encounter have accepted the dominant frame of opposition, and will seek to start by asking you to define or defend critical race theory.

- \* One primary goal of AAPF’s Messaging Guide is to prevent you from falling into this trap, which distorts the real issues. You can let your interviewer know in advance after the initial contact by email or phone, that this dominant framing promotes a false debate. You can say, “I am willing to be interviewed about critical race theory, but I will not start out defending or defining it because that just contributes to the dominant framing that I disagree with.”

Here are some phrases to help execute a pivot:

- \* *While I’m happy to answer that question, let me first say that....”*
- \* *“There’s a lot behind that question. Let me begin to unpack that by asking, what is really behind all these attacks?”*
- \* *I can certainly talk about critical race theory, but first let me say that the real question is not about what CRT is or isn’t; the real question is about the highly coordinated disinformation campaign funded by dark money to undermine multiracial democracy and public education.*

## D. FINAL TIPS

- \* Don’t be afraid to stop talking: For TV and radio, OK to ask for re-do’s.
- \* If you don’t know an answer, don’t make one up. It’s perfectly fine to say, “I don’t have that information handy, but let me know your deadline, and I’ll do my best to get it to you.” Or if you’re on air live, execute a pivot and say, “What’s really important to focus on at this moment is...”
- \* Rehearse: Film yourself at home and watch back: This is guaranteed to improve your interview
- \* Don’t repeat the opposition’s soundbites: If you get a Q: Is CRT racist?

- \* **DON’T SAY: No, CRT is not racist**
- \* **DO SAY: No. CRT is a field of study that asks why we have such visible and durable racial inequality centuries after Emancipation and decades after the adoption of formal equality and “colorblind” ideals.**

Media Training 201 is a joint public education project of African American Policy Forum, Black Lives Matter at School, and Zinn Education Project. We thank Janine Jackson, Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting and Chris Nelson, Pyramid Communications for providing their Best Practices for Interviewing with media.