



Sound Bites with Bite

One of the key skills for working effectively with the media is the ability to frame a potent sound bite.

The term was first coined in the early 1980's, when Ronald Reagan became well known for delivering pithy and memorable statements in plain, but evocative language. ("A people free to choose will always choose peace.") Sound bites have become increasingly important as news stories (whether in print, on TV or radio, or online) have become shorter and the news cycle has lengthened to 24 hours. It is increasingly hard to be heard over this never-ending din.

Because they must increasingly say more in less time, reporters are always seeking these quotable nuggets that convey passion and a point of view and that are attributable to a credible source (you!).

When the media calls or when you are getting ready to reach out to the media, here are few tips for developing sound bites that will get you and your issue into the paper or on the news.

1. **Know your message.** It is one thing to put together a witty or entertaining quote, but if it doesn't say what you want to communicate, then you've not only wasted your time and effort, you may have sabotaged your own position.
2. **Start with a clear, basic message.** Really good, memorable sound bites can be hard to come by. At the very least you want to be able to convey your position in concrete, jargon-free language in a sentence or two.
3. **Remember your poetry.** You may have forgotten the basics of poetic construction, but the sound bite is in fact a bit of non-fiction poetry. Get out your high school English text book and re-learn (and then try using):

-Similes and metaphors ("Guided Care is like having a nurse in the family.")

-Rhyme ("When speaking of the old, there is reason to be bold.")

-Repetition ("Home Hospital is a winner. Payers love it, doctors love it, and most important, patients love it.")

-Contrast ("I was so much older then. I'm younger than that now." "The question is not how I will die, but how I will live.")

4. **Play off of common lines.** This can include famous poetry like ("A rose by any other name") or a commercial ("Can you hear me now?" "Where's the beef?").

-The scientific prospects for aging research have never been greater and yet the prospects for aging research funding are bleak. In many ways, it is both the best and the worst of times.

5. **Set it up.** The sound bite may end with something memorable, but you may need a more prosaic sentence to frame it up. See the example in number 4.
6. **Take a chance, though check the downside if possible.** Chances are a good that a sound bite doesn't sound a lot like how you speak to your professional colleagues, and good sound bites are generally more conversational, humorous, or edgy than your average professional



comment. The direct, declarative position embodied in a good sound bite may be risky, as may its more casual tone. We encourage people to take chances and get out of their comfort zone, yet still check in with others to see if there are any hidden connotations or implications you may not have thought of and may want to avoid.