

# COMMUNICATING WITH THE PUBLIC

PWS-SG 3

This summary guide is for National Meteorological and Hydrological Services (NMHSs) staff who have to communicate a message to the public. It provides advice on how to broadcast effectively. If you are a meteorologist who broadcasts weather forecasts and information on radio or television, or a senior manager who holds press conferences, then this guide is for you.



## Why is it necessary to develop communication skills?

The following ten (10) principles will ensure that you are effective when communicating to the general public. If you follow these steps, then you can be confident that your message will be understood by your intended audience.

## How to communicate effectively with the public

1. **Speak clearly:** Use everyday language and a conversational tone whenever possible. Speak in the language or dialect that gets the message to as many people as possible.
  2. **Understand your audience:** Know the level of scientific comprehension of your audience and align your message accordingly. If necessary, use analogies to explain things. Perhaps imagine that you are explaining something complex to a young student.
  3. **Know your subject:** If you do not know your subject matter, get help from someone who does. If necessary, use them as the “science voice” while you deliver the rest of the message.
  4. **Be truthful:** If you do not have answers to questions from the audience or interviewer – say so. Promise to get back to the person at a later time with the answer. And deliver on this promise.
  5. **Watch your body language:** Coughing, touching your face, not making eye contact, slouching, fidgeting – these can all be interpreted as signs of
6. **Answer the question:** If you do not have the correct answer at hand, or you do not know the official policy on a matter – say so. Then find the person that does.
  7. **Avoid saying “no comment”:** If you say “no comment”, your audience might assume that you are perhaps hiding something that you are guilty of.
  8. **Repeat yourself:** Many audiences do not give full attention all the time. Be prepared to repeat the message again and again.
  9. **Practice:** If you are making a prepared speech, practice out loud in front of a mirror or a friendly audience. Make sure that the words flow easily. Avoid any phrases that could be misinterpreted or words that might prove hard to pronounce when under stress.
  10. **Be prepared:** If possible, get the interview questions beforehand. If you cannot, anticipate what the questions might be and prepare for them. Good preparation will help you manage difficult interviews.

## K.I.S.S. – Keep It Simple and Succinct

Tell them what you will tell them. Tell them. Tell them what you have just told them.

## Good communication

- Speak in ‘clips’ – short, succinct phrases that “punch a point”. Journalists are more likely to quote your short

clips in their entirety, therefore removing the likelihood that you will be misquoted or misunderstood.

high-impact weather events when a serious tone is needed to convey a serious message.

- Know when to smile and – more importantly – when NOT to smile. This is especially important during
- Enunciate. Do not mumble. Do not speak too fast.

### Shift the emphasis – change the message

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Practice the following exercise to see how emphasizing different words completely changes the meaning

I DID NOT BREAK THAT DISH  
(but someone else did)

I DID NOT BREAK THAT DISH  
(absolutely, positively did not)

I DID NOT BREAK THAT DISH  
(but I may have cracked it)

I DID NOT BREAK THAT DISH  
(but I may have broken another one)

I DID NOT BREAK THAT DISH  
(but I broke the matching cup)

Note: This summary guide is based on the “PWS Guidelines on Weather Broadcasting and The Use of Radio for the Delivery of Weather Information” (WMO/TD No. 1278) - Available at [www.wmo.int/pws](http://www.wmo.int/pws)



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