

Recovery & Uncertainty in Media Interviews

Everyone makes mistakes in interviews. What matters most is how you recover in the moment and how you respond afterward if your words cause confusion or controversy. This handout gives you recovery phrases, damage-control steps, and insights about uncertainty avoidance to help you regain control of your message.

Top 5 Recovery Phrases (In the Moment)

"Let me rephrase that..." Gives you a reset button if you realize your wording wasn't clear.
"What I meant to say is..." Allows you to clarify and redirect before the reporter runs with your first version.
"What's important to know is..." A bridging statement that steers the conversation back to your main talking point.
"To put it another way..." Helps simplify or restate your point if you got too technical or detailed.
"The key takeaway here is..." Refocuses the audience on your strongest message, even after a slip-up.

If a Mistake Causes Controversy (After the Interview)

Sometimes a mistake or poorly worded comment gets published or amplified. Here's how to minimize the damage:

1. Don't ignore it. Address the issue quickly and professionally.

2. Acknowledge the mistake without repeating the negative. (e.g., say “I misspoke, what I should have said is...”).
3. Clarify your message with your key points.
4. Work with your Communications team to issue a correction or clarification if needed.
5. Stay consistent in all follow-ups, repeat your clarified message, not the mistake.

Example:

Mistake printed: “Department admits program hasn’t worked.”

Correction: “I misspoke in my interview. What I should have emphasized is that while the challenges are real, our program has already connected hundreds of residents to housing, and we are expanding services to make an even bigger impact.”

Why Humans Hate Uncertainty

Audiences dislike uncertainty. When a spokesperson hesitates, contradicts themselves, or says “no comment,” people often assume the worst.

Hofstede’s cultural dimension of [Uncertainty Avoidance](#) explains how comfortable people are with ambiguity and the unknown. This applies directly to media interviews, because when messages are vague or unclear, audiences feel anxious and may assume the worst.

• **High Uncertainty Avoidance cultures:** Prefer clear rules, structure, and certainty. In interviews, audiences expect confident, factual, and direct answers. Vagueness or saying “no comment” is especially damaging here.

Examples: [Greece](#), [Portugal](#), [Japan](#), [France](#), [South Korea](#), [Mexico](#).

• **Low Uncertainty Avoidance cultures:** More comfortable with ambiguity and flexible approaches. However, even in these contexts, too much vagueness

can look evasive. Clarity and storytelling still build trust.

Examples: Singapore, Denmark, Sweden, Jamaica, the UK, the United States.

Why it matters in media: Reporters seek clarity, and the public expects reassurance. When facing uncertainty (health crises, disasters, infrastructure issues), your role is to reduce anxiety by replacing uncertainty with clear, confident, and consistent messages.