

Public Relations Officer interview questions

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What to expect

Interviews for Public Relations Officer roles test writing ability, media judgement and how candidates handle pressure, since much of the job involves representing an organisation publicly with limited time to get the message right. Employers also want evidence of steady relationships with journalists and stakeholders, not just campaign wins.

- **Behavioural:** Questions about past campaigns, stakeholder relationships or difficult situations, usually answered with a STAR structure.
- **Scenario/crisis:** Hypothetical situations testing judgement under pressure, such as a negative story breaking or a spokesperson going off message.
- **Technical/writing:** Questions or short exercises testing press release writing, tone and news judgement.
- **Process:** Questions about how you run a campaign or manage day-to-day media enquiries from start to finish.

Most PR Officer interviews start with a phone or video screen focused on writing samples and media experience, followed by a panel interview with the communications manager and a senior stakeholder or HR representative. Many employers include a short writing or media response exercise, either sent beforehand or completed on the day, before moving to a final discussion about fit and availability.

1. Walk me through how you'd handle a journalist calling with an urgent enquiry about a negative story involving the organisation.

Why they ask

Tests process under time pressure and judgement about what to say, what to check, and who to loop in before responding.

How to structure your answer

Walk-through: describe the sequence of steps in order, from taking the call to final response, noting decision points along the way.

Example answer

"First I'd get the journalist's deadline and exact question in writing if possible, then brief the relevant manager or spokesperson immediately rather than guessing at an answer. I'd check the facts internally, agree on a short holding statement if we can't respond in full straight away, and make sure the final response is approved before it goes out. Throughout, I'd keep a record of what was said and when, in case follow-up questions come in."

2. Tell me about a campaign you developed and ran from strategy through to execution.

Why they ask

Assesses whether the candidate can plan and deliver a campaign, not just execute someone else's brief.

How to structure your answer

STAR: situation, task, action, result.

Example answer

"A client needed to rebuild trust with a community after a service disruption. My task was to develop a communication plan that acknowledged the issue and rebuilt confidence. I wrote key messages, briefed a spokesperson for local media interviews, and ran a short social content series through

Canva and Hootsuite to reach the affected audience directly. Media sentiment monitored through Meltwater shifted from mostly negative to neutral within the campaign period, and the client asked us to use the same approach for future issues."

3. How do you decide which journalists or outlets to pitch a story to, and how do you maintain those relationships over time?

Why they ask

Media relationships are central to the role and employers want to see this is deliberate, not accidental.

How to structure your answer

Process: explain your approach step by step, from identifying the right contact to maintaining the relationship long term.

Example answer

"I start by matching the story to outlets and journalists who've covered similar topics before, checking recent coverage so the pitch is relevant rather than generic. I keep a simple record of who covers what and their preferred contact method, and I follow up on stories they've run with a thank you or additional information if useful. Even when I don't have a pitch, I check in occasionally so the relationship isn't purely transactional."

4. Write a short media statement (three to four sentences) announcing that an organisation has changed its opening hours due to renovations.

Why they ask

Tests core writing skill: clarity, tone and news judgement under a tight brief.

How to structure your answer

Technical exercise: produce a draft, then be ready to explain word choices and structure if asked.

Example answer

"[Organisation] will operate on reduced hours from [date] while renovations are completed at its main site. Customers can expect the usual service resuming in full once works are finished, with updates provided through the website and social channels in the meantime. The organisation thanks customers for their patience during this period. I'd lead with the practical detail first, since that's what readers and journalists need most, then close with a brief acknowledgement rather than promotional language."

5. Describe a time you had to manage a stakeholder who disagreed with your recommended messaging.

Why they ask

Checks stakeholder management and whether the candidate can hold a professional line without damaging the relationship.

How to structure your answer

STAR: situation, task, action, result.

Example answer

"A senior manager wanted to downplay an issue in a statement that I felt needed more direct acknowledgement to maintain credibility with media. I explained the likely media reaction to a vague statement and showed examples of how similar situations had played out for comparable organisations. We agreed on a version that kept his key point but added the acknowledgement I'd recommended. The statement went out without follow-up questions from journalists, which we took as a sign it had struck the right balance."

6. How do you measure whether a communication campaign has actually worked?

Why they ask

Tests understanding of monitoring and evaluation beyond just running the campaign.

How to structure your answer

Process: outline the metrics and tools you'd use and how you'd report results.

Example answer

"I look at media coverage volume and tone through Meltwater, social engagement through Hootsuite, and, where relevant, any direct feedback from the audience the campaign targeted. I compare sentiment and coverage before and after the campaign rather than just counting mentions, since a spike in coverage isn't useful if the tone is negative. I report this back to stakeholders with a short summary of what worked and what I'd adjust next time."