



Marking a Century of Women's Suffrage  
Commémorer un siècle du droit de vote des femmes

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## Making Change: Engaging with the Media

*Making Change* is a collection of skill-based education modules, created to equip young women for a variety of political engagement.

These toolkits have three objectives:

1. To **engage and educate** women on a variety of issues that affect their daily lives in work and day-to-day
2. To **enable** women across Canada to explore different pathways to make change and engage in politics and policy on these issues
3. To **provide** policy options, strategies for engagement, and tools of empowerment to allow women to participate in the political and policy process in Canada



## Why your voice in the media matters and the impact you can have:

Generally speaking - your voice matters in the media because it brings attention to something you care about, or want people to know. While you may think that anyone could say the same thing for you, it is important to recognize the importance of *your* voice in the media. Depending on who you are and what you're talking about, it could be likely that the subject either does not get media attention, or that a perspective like yours isn't usually given a platform.

As a way to amplify your message, the media can help you spread your message beyond just those that already might agree with you or understand your perspective. Not only does engaging with the media demonstrate to the audience that *you* actually have a voice - and thoughts and ideas and opinions on matters, but it also can open up the conversation for others to be able to share their voices as well. You come from a very different background and you come with different views and opinions that not everyone sees, by having your voice heard through the media you will be able to express your views and educate a wider range of people.

## When and how you might engage with the media:

**Someone in the media may approach you at an event you are attending or may find you in other ways - on social media, through word of mouth, through your job or post-secondary institution, for example.**

If this happens, get the details! What media outlet, what's the issue, why do they want to speak to you? Is it TV, radio, print, or online? Will it be live or recorded? Make sure you know where you stand on the issue. Whether it's in approaching media directly or them approaching you at an event or to speak on an issue, take a moment to ask yourself, "What is the message I want to share?". If you aren't sure where you stand, you run the risk of contradicting yourself mid-interview.

**You may seek out the media yourself! If you have an important perspective, idea, or experience on an issue in the media or a story that *should* be covered in the news you can actively reach out yourself.**



## How to connect with journalists or producers:

Twitter is surprisingly effective for this -- a lot of them use Twitter to identify potential commentators. If you follow a particular journalist online and occasionally retweet them when you like the things they say, chances are, they will eventually engage with some of your tweets. When they need someone to comment, they may DM you. You can also Tweet at or DM them on specific issues.

You can also be more assertive about it if you have a very specific message you want to get out. At events like rallies or press conferences (pressers), journalists are trawling the crowd, looking for people to comment. So if you approach one and introduce yourself, more likely than not, they will want to ask for comments -- after all, you're making their job easier! Make sure that when you intro yourself, you let them know who you are insofar as how you're relevant to the topic being discussed. That will help them decide whether it's useful to interview you (maybe they already have two people they've interviewed who already offer the same angle?) as well as what questions to ask you to best draw out the message you want to emphasize.

## How to prepare for radio or TV?

### The Superficial

Drink some warm water to clear your throat (AVOID DAIRY 2-3 HOURS BEFORE YOU GO ON) and to ensure that you're well-hydrated. Most studios will also offer you a glass of water: accept the offer! It's not just hospitality; they benefit from having you well-hydrated and speaking smoothly. If you're going on TV, do take some time for yourself to make sure you look your best! If you're someone who likes to call a friend to pick out an outfit (and you have the time to do so), then do that. You'll speak more confidently if you feel confident.

### The Substantive

Get your talking points ready! If you can, have a phone call with someone you trust who is more experienced in this field. Go over potential questions together and prepare a few bullet points of how you'd respond to each. Don't write a speech and there is no need to study or memorize everything, but do make sure that you have an answer in mind for some of the most likely questions you'll get. Don't worry about anticipating ALL the questions -- they'll always ask you a few things that you weren't ready for. But as long as you have the big pieces figured out, you'll be fine.

### Focus on the message YOU want to send

Have three points down and try to touch on them in your answers to every question, this helps you stay on message and ensures that the point you want to make is heard. It is crucial to be absolutely positive that your information is true and have the points to back it up. Sometimes it helps to have 2-3 facts or stats written down that you can pull.



### **The Mental State**

Get there 20 mins early. Make a plan to ensure that you aren't running late or even "just barely on time." Give yourself time to catch your breath, to run to the bathroom, to fix your hair or makeup, to go over your talking points one last time, to text a friend, whatever else. The important thing is that you don't want to feel rushed.

### **Smile & Engage with the host**

Even if you're talking about a serious topic, smile at the beginning when you're greeting the host and at the end when you're signing off. It will help you feel more confident, and it'll also make you look more confident, too. If you're on radio, always jot down the host's name so you can refer to them by name.

## **Writing and pitching an op-ed or letter to the editor**

The length of op-eds range from 500-700 words. Air on the shorter side when you can. Letters to the editor are even shorter.

Steer clear of jargon and use accessible language and structure your argument clearly. Read a few published opinion pieces on the publication you are targeting and see what they do. What makes them enjoyable to read? Sometimes op-eds are successful when they take a bit of a conversational tone - they are not a class essay - but do make sure your arguments are strong.

When you send in an op-ed, make sure you position yourself in relation to the issue when you sign it. What makes you a strong/important voice on the issue. This could be "Jane Doe, Resident of Mars" - if the issue is happening on Mars - or "Jane Amer, Political Science Student", or "Jane Chan, Engineer", or "Jane Bob, Member of X organization".

The order of things:

- 1) write the article
- 2) run it by someone and actually listen to their edits
- 3) do #2 again. Not just by friend, but by a mentor or a colleague with expertise in the field.
- 4) email it to the editors at the different publications. Most publications have specific ways to do it, like an email address to send it to in an attachment, or an online form to fill out.
- 5) remember that you should only submit to one publication at a time -- publishers do NOT like it if you pitch the same thing to multiple. There are usually rules about not publishing the same thing in multiple publications, and it won't look good if you're offering a piece to someone that just got published by someone else.



## Dealing with imposter syndrome

If you're worried that maybe you're not a good fit, call a mentor or a friend who actually knows this field to ask. Sad reality is, there ARE times when they will bring you on a panel because you're their only woman, or their only racialized woman, and you may end up on a panel of all old white dudes who have already spent 40 years in this field... and you may end up out of your league if the topic is, say, comparing political strategy of candidates based on something that happened 30 years ago. If that's the case, you may be better opting out. (If you ask the producer, they will tell you who else is on the panel.)

However, those times are rare. Don't make that decision without getting a second opinion. 99% of the time, if you're being asked, it's because the producers genuinely believe you have something useful to add to the conversation. Maybe you offer a voice or a perspective that is seriously lacking.

If you doubt yourself, that's fine. But don't ever make that decision based on your own self-doubt. Get a second opinion. More likely than not, you're a good fit, and you were invited on for a reason. Your voice matters

The perspective of a Daughter of the Vote: *"There have been other times when I was asked to be on a panel alongside two highly experienced PR consultants and political strategists, and I didn't think I'd have anything to add. But the "second opinion" pointed out that this was an issue that I'd spent a lot of time as an activist on -- and indeed, that's exactly the angle that the TV station ended up wanting from me."*

The perspective of a Daughter of the Vote Supporter: *"I have been invited on several panels, because they needed a 'woman'. But you know what? I'm an expert in my field and I'll take that opportunity to show them what leadership and expertise can look like. My perspective matters."*

The perspective of a Daughter of the Vote Supporter: *"Repeat after me into a mirror "you are an expert, they wouldn't have asked you if you weren't, you're going to kill it and your voice matters".*