

Tip Sheet for the 2012 Capitol Hill Press Conference

Colorado State Capitol, Old Supreme Court Chambers
February 10, 2012 – Please be in place not later than 8:30 a.m.

These tips are intended to help your students prepare for a successful press conference. Each student attending should receive a copy.

Rules & Etiquette

1. Dress in business attire: slacks with collared shirts and appropriate-length skirts with non-revealing tops; no jeans.
2. Turn off cell phones.
3. No food or drinks are allowed in the Old Supreme Court Chambers.
4. Photographers are free (actually, encouraged) to move around the chambers during the conference, but avoid getting between the speakers and the students to whom they are speaking.
5. You should be familiar with education issues currently being discussed in the Colorado legislature and other hot topics as well as whether the senators have dealt with those issues prior to the press conference.
6. Raise your hand to ask a question. When the presenter calls on you, stand up, clearly tell him your name and what school you are from, and then ask your question. Speak loudly so everyone can hear your question. Once your question is asked you may sit down so you can take notes.
7. Only students may ask questions.

Posing Questions at a Press Conference (from Poynter.org)

1. Prepare your questions in advance.
2. Ask open-ended questions. Questions that start with how, why or what, or encourage an explanation have a better chance to provoke a complete response.
3. One question at a time. Don't combine two or more questions.
4. Listen to all questions asked by other students and the answers given. You may not get the chance to ask your question and may have to write from the answers given to other reporters. Also, you do not want to be repetitive in asking similar questions to ones already posed.

Press Conference Writing Tips

Questions reporters ask at a press conference are often more important than the prepared statement the speaker makes. Answers to those questions are an important part of the story.

The following are pieces of information that every press conference story should answer:

1. The person who conducted the interview.
2. The reason for the press conference and background.
3. Highlights of the news, including responses to the questions.
4. Location when relevant.

The answers are incorporated into the story but without reference to the question. So, "When asked about . . ." or "In response to a question . . ." should be avoided.

Source: Carole Rich, University of Alaska, Anchorage

What to Bring

1. Your prepared questions. Outside research should be limited to general information that helps you become familiar with issues to prepare your questions; we want everyone to write with the same information – gathered at the press conference.
2. Laptop computer with power cord and power strip. It is acceptable to write stories by hand if you prefer.
3. CD or thumb drive to save your story to. If you don't bring a computer, please write neatly by hand.
4. Note paper and pens/pencils.
5. Still camera.
6. Video equipment, as well as microphones for video teams. Lighting in the Old Supreme Court Chambers will be behind the speakers so you may want to bring lights.

The Contests

Students will be allotted 90 minutes – immediately following the press conference – to create a journalistic piece to be entered into the CHPC Contests. There are two categories: print journalism and video media broadcast. Research should be limited to information gathered at the press conference. Some background gleaned from question preparation may be included. While press conference notes may be used to write, no research notes may be used. No adviser assistance is allowed once students begin production.

Rules for Writing Contest

1. Each school print medium is allowed one entry; two students may collaborate.
2. After a brief recess, and without adviser contact, students will have 90 minutes to compose stories.
3. Hard copies, a CD, or a thumb drive must be submitted at the end of the allotted time.
4. The winners will be notified through their adviser.
5. CHSPA will print the winning story on its website.

Rules for Video Contest

1. Production crews will be allowed to tape the conference and enter the video contest.
2. Video media clips must be less than three minutes long once complete.
3. The winners will be notified through their adviser.
4. CHSPA posts the winning video entry to its website.

Judging

Each contest entry – for both contests – will be evaluated by professional journalists who work at Colorado newspapers, television stations or online media outlets. Final winners will be determined by CHSPA Board members who have extensive experience in either video media or print publication, based exclusively on the judges' input.