

## Preparing for a Press Conference

### PRESS

#### Background:

- A tornado touched down in your town approximately half an hour ago.
- Your newsroom has been receiving calls from residents reporting heavy damage in the downtown area, including broken windows, downed power lines and fallen trees.
- The last tornado that struck your town was in 1982. It killed two dozen people and caused millions of dollars in damage.
- Heavy thunderstorms continue to move through your area.

#### Your task:

On a piece of paper, work together to write at least 10 questions that you would like to ask the public officials holding the press conference in order to fill in the gaps in the information above. You will have the opportunity to ask these questions at the press conference. Keep in mind that your ultimate goal is to get vital information to the public so that everyone will understand what has happened and will happen.

#### Steps for the simulation:

1. Seat members of the press and the mayor's office on opposite sides of the room.
2. A representative or representatives for the mayor's office will go to the front of the room and present a two-minute overview of the situation.
3. The mayor's office will answer questions from the press for five minutes. Members of the press must raise their hands and wait to be called on by a member of the mayor's office.
4. The press conference will conclude after no more than 10 minutes.

## Preparing for a Press Conference MAYOR'S OFFICE

### Background:

- A tornado touched down in your town approximately half an hour ago.
- The tornado was very strong. It was rated F3 – “severe” – on a scale of F0 to F5.
- The tornado struck the heavily populated downtown area, breaking windows in hundreds of buildings.
- Power lines have fallen throughout the city and at least half of the city is without electricity. The mayor’s office is currently using back-up generators. More people will likely lose power as trees that were destabilized by the storm continue to fall.
- You do not yet have a count of how many people have been injured or killed, but 911 calls have reported at least three fatalities.
- The structure of at least one large building downtown was heavily damaged, leaving the building in danger of collapsing.
- The downtown area is currently being evacuated due to the amount of debris and questions about building stability.
- Several firefighters and two fire trucks are currently trapped in a collapsed warehouse near the edge of the downtown area.
- Many roads are impassable, making a full assessment of the damage impossible at this time.
- Some of the generators at the 911 call center are working, but callers may have difficulty getting through to an operator.
- Heavy thunderstorms continue to move through the area; more tornadoes are possible.

### Your task:

On a piece of paper, work together to write a two-minute statement summarizing the information above. You will deliver this statement and then take questions from the press. Before the press conference begins, decide if you want to invent any details beyond the facts listed above. When answering questions, be prepared to deal with questions you can’t answer, either because you do not think it wise to share the information or because you do not know the answer. Keep in mind that your ultimate goal is to satisfy public curiosity while also protecting public safety.

### Steps for the simulation:

1. Seat members of the press and the mayor’s office on opposite sides of the room.
2. A representative or representatives for the public officials will go to the front of the room and present a two-minute overview of the situation.
3. The public officials will answer questions from the press for five minutes. Members of the press must raise their hands and wait to be called on by an official.
4. The press conference will conclude after no more than 10 minutes.

Name:  
Date:

## Covering a Catastrophe Gallery Guide

### Visit the 9-11 Gallery (Level 4)

Find the chronology of events on Sept. 11, 2001, that encircles the crumpled broadcast antenna at the center of the gallery.

**Find the events listed below.** Read the captions and examine the photographs, then fill out the chart to compare and contrast how each group reacted to key moments. Think about the actions each individual might take, and be specific in your answers.

Time/Event	How would a journalist at the scene respond?	How would a firefighter or police officer respond?	How would a member of the public respond?
<b>8:53 a.m. ET</b> Plane crashes into World Trade Center			
<b>10:07 a.m.</b> One World Trade Center tower collapses			
<b>10:30 a.m.</b> New York Gov. George Pataki declares state of emergency			

**Think about and discuss:** What did all of these groups' responses to the events of 9/11 have in common? How was each group's experience that day unique?

Name:

Date:

**Find the wall of front pages from 9/11.** Choose two that you think are interesting and fill out the chart below. You can also find copies of the pages in a binder below the display.

Name of Newspaper 1: \_\_\_\_\_

City/State/Country: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Newspaper 2: \_\_\_\_\_

City/State/Country: \_\_\_\_\_

What images do these front pages use?

Newspaper 1	Newspaper 2

When you look at each page, how do you feel?

Newspaper 1	Newspaper 2

What aspect of the event does this newspaper focus on? Terrorism? Victims and their families? Something else?

Newspaper 1	Newspaper 2

**Think about and discuss:** Are there any ideas or themes that multiple 9/11 front pages have in common? How has the way 9/11 was portrayed in the news affected our understanding of the event? Is there any information on the front pages that we later learned was not true?

Name:

Date:



## Planning for the Unpredictable

You and your team are going to design a news outlet's disaster response plan. When formulating your plan, keep in mind that you may want to have multiple options in response to each question to maximize flexibility and effectiveness.

Your news outlet (TV news station, local news blog, etc.): \_\_\_\_\_

### Disaster Response Plan

When will you begin reporting on the disaster? (Immediately? After public safety officials have briefed the public on what happened/is happening? The next day?)

How will you communicate with your staff? (Keep in mind that some forms of communication may be working better than others.)

Who will work? (If large numbers of your staff are unable to reach the office, are people available to fill in?)

Where will your staff work? If your office space is no longer safe, where will you go?

**Name:**

**Date:**



Whom will you attempt to contact to get information about what has happened/is happening? (Keep in mind that many people will be trying to gather this information. Some sources may become overwhelmed, so you will need multiple options.)

How will you share your information with the public? What if your usual form of publication is not working? Are there other ways to share the information you gather?

What instructions will you give your staff concerning balancing their safety with the need to gather information?

What instructions will you give your staff concerning fact-checking/confirming information about what has happened/is happening?

Other ideas for how your news outlet will respond to a disaster: