



# NWF Guide to Crafting a Sound Bite

Distilling your messaging into a bite-sized quote to get it on the air

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## What is a Sound Bite?

Sound bites are the distillation of your message into a short phrase or sentence that is both memorable and instantly provides a clear statement of your position even to the reader or viewer who is totally unfamiliar with the issue you are addressing.

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## Elements of a Sound Bite

**Express the essential point — *not the details.***

A good sound bite gets to the core of the matter quickly. A sound bite is a focused, succinct and brief statement. The sound bite *does not* provide context or detail.

The most common misconception people have in writing quote or sound bite lines is they need to provide the context of the issue being addressed. A good sound bite should be stripped of context and qualification. If a sound bite is intended to insert a quote into a news report or electronic broadcast you can count on the reporter to provide the context. A sound bite placed in the first or second paragraph of a press release can be followed by whatever context or qualifications are needed. In an interview, a sound bite opens the door to explaining the context and providing the facts that back up the message.

### Staying “On-Message”

It’s easy to write inflammatory sound bites. But a sound bite that’s over the top is also off-message. A sound bite not only needs to be brief and memorable, it must also accurately capture the essential message you and your organization want to communicate.

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## Sound Bite Techniques

**Alliteration:** This is one of the easiest techniques to employ. Think of the word or words that are central to your issue, then come up with like-sounding words that can be used to craft your sound bite.

- Example: The sound bite “a victory for wildlife over wildcatters and grassroots over greed” was picked up by the Associated Press in reporting a U.S. Senate vote against opening the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to oil drilling.

**Analogy:** Connecting your position to a well understood analogy is often a good way to craft a sound bite.

- Example: “The Senator’s proposal is like a party balloon, colorful on the outside, but full of hot air on the inside.”

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## Sound Bite Techniques (continued)

**Pop Culture/Current Events:** Using a well understood example from current popular culture or news can make a good sound bite to explain your issue.

- Example: In reference to a federal plan to balance conservation and energy development in the Western Arctic Reserve, the sound bite, “This is a nice holiday present for America’s waterfowl hunters and birdwatchers,” used mid-December timing to capitalize on holiday awareness and was picked up in Reuters.

**The Simple Statement:** When cleverness eludes you, stick to the basics. The brief, unembellished statement of your bottom line is your trusty standby.

- Example: “The Gulf of Mexico is a crime scene and the perpetrator cannot be left in charge of assessing the damage,” was an unglamorous, but straightforward sound bite that got AP coverage in reporting on the Gulf oil disaster.

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## Remember...

The time invested in crafting messages and sound bites pays big dividends. Spending a third of the time used in writing a news release on crafting the one or two sound bites that will make it into print or onto the air is a reasonable rule of thumb. It’s virtually always true that you’ll spend more time on crafting a sound bite than on any other element in a news release. When you’ve distilled your message into a good sound bite and you have your facts and arguments lined up to support that message, you’re ready to go to the media.