

Student Publications

Covering Student Senate

The following is a list of tips for covering Student Senate meetings:

- **Know when and where.** Always double check where the meeting will be hosted and when it will start.
- **Know the key items on the agenda.** Since Senate doesn't put out agendas until right before the meeting, this could mean just asking your editor or senators. Do this in advance of the meeting.
- **Research the key items.** Covering Senate (or any meeting) isn't about just showing up. Once you ask about key items on the agenda, research them in advance so that you aren't lost during the meeting.
- **Ask what key players expect.** It's ok to ask key players to speculate and comment on what they think will happen at the meeting. Do this in advance to add "color" to your final story.
- **Get an agenda.** As soon as you get to the meeting get an agenda. This will help you follow along as they go.
- **Know the major players.** You don't have to know the entire Senate, but it's important to be able to recognize members of the executive committee and those who have bills on the table or tend to speak up on a lot of issues. This will make it easier to get quotes from the meeting and to follow along.
- **Draw a chart.** Draw a diagram of the people on a board or body and spell all of their names correctly and write their official titles so you know exactly who is saying what without having to write their entire name every time. This is helpful in a lot of meetings, but may be difficult based on how the Senate sits during meetings.
- **Be on time.** Actually, be early. It's good to go early, introduce yourself to others at the meeting and chat with the people you know you'll need to interview later.
- **Attend the entire meeting.** Never leave early. Leaving before the business is over makes it likely that you will miss part of the news. Get to the event early and talk to people, talk to people afterward too. Walk out when people do during the meeting if you need an interview. It's not over until it's over. Never put up your pencil and paper until you are in your car. Some of the best stuff happens after the meeting or in the parking lot.
- **Take good notes.** Be sure to take good notes on all issues, even if you don't think they're the most important things. It's always better to have things you don't need than be missing something you do. It may be helpful to develop your own shorthand for these types of things.

- **Note surroundings.** Take notes about people's actions and their surroundings. You don't have to use them, but it's nice to have them if you need them.
- **Cover everyone.** Cover the event, but not just what the main people are doing. Notice how many people are in the audience. If it's standing-room-only, that is newsworthy. If there aren't many people, where are they? Do people not care about this issue? Could you bring up the fact that the meeting was not at its regular time or place?
- **Get all of the votes.** Be sure you take good records of each vote, including votes in favor, against and abstentions. If one or two people vote differently than the rest of the body, you need to ask them why.
- **Don't participate.** Never ask questions during the meeting. You are there to observe, not to participate.
- **Get interviews quick.** Grab interviews right after the meeting before the people you need leave. This will seem hectic at the time, but it will save you time in the long run and help you meet deadline.
- **Get follow-up numbers.** Even though you interview sources after the meeting, be sure to get follow-up numbers in case you have more questions while you're writing.
- **Surrounding yourself with news.** Sit in the middle of the crowd, close to the front. Surround yourself by the people who are the story. Avoid reporter tables unless they make you sit there. It separates you from the audience.
- **Be prepared.** Prepare questions beforehand and don't leave until they are all answered. Make a running list of additional questions you need to ask. Get to the important people fast before they leave. Listen to other people's questions and use them in your story.