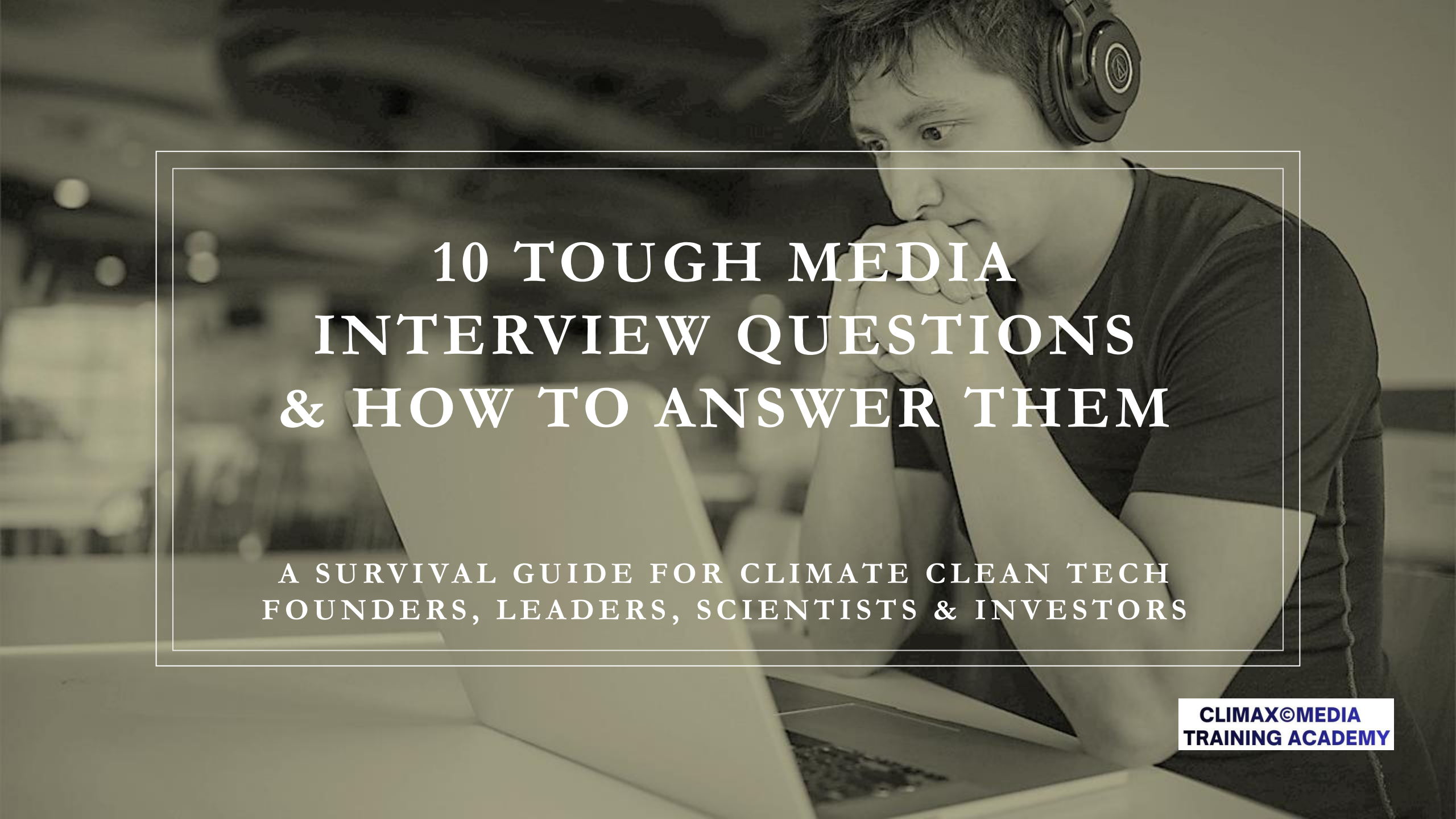




**MEDIA
TRAINING**



10 TOUGH MEDIA INTERVIEW QUESTIONS & HOW TO ANSWER THEM

A SURVIVAL GUIDE FOR CLIMATE CLEAN TECH
FOUNDERS, LEADERS, SCIENTISTS & INVESTORS

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Introduction

You've secured a media interview. Congratulations! Whether it's with The Guardian, FNGN, Nikkei Tokyo, Australia Financial Review, ABC RN Radio, Morning TV, a trade publication, or a podcast - this is your chance to amplify your environmental impact, attract investors, and build credibility.

But here's the reality: journalists ask tough questions. They're trained to probe, challenge, and uncover the full story. A poorly handled question can undermine months of work, spook investors, or damage your reputation.

This guide prepares you for the 10 most challenging questions environmental professionals face in media interviews—and gives you proven frameworks to respond with confidence, clarity, and credibility.

Who This Guide Is For:

- **Environmental startup founders** seeking funding or customers
- **Scientists communicating research** to public audiences
- **Sustainability executives representing** corporations
- **Climate tech investors defending** portfolio choices
- **Engineers explaining complex** environmental technologies

First Lesson

BRIDGE, DON'T DODGE

How to Use This Guide

Each tough question includes:

- ✓ **Why journalists ask it** - Understanding their motivation
- ✓ **What they're really asking** - The subtext beneath the question
- ✓ **The framework** - Your strategic approach to answering
- ✓ **Sample answer** - A word-for-word response you can adapt
- ✓ **What to avoid** - Common mistakes that backfire
- ✓ **Pro tip** - Advanced tactics from media professionals

Before we dive in: The golden rule of media interviews is **BRIDGE, DON'T DODGE**. Never ignore a tough question. Always acknowledge it briefly, then bridge to your pre-prepared key message.



High-Value Elements:

ACTIONABLE

pre/during/post interview
checklists

RED FLAGS

when to push back on
journalists

BRIDGE, FLAG, AND REDIRECT

techniques for difficult
moments

REAL CONTEXT FOR ENVIRONMENTAL SECTOR

(climate targets, hard-to-abate
sectors, policy landscape)

Tough Question #1

"Your technology sounds great in theory, but why hasn't anyone successfully scaled this before?"



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Why They Ask It:

Generally, Journalists are skeptical of "miracle solutions" and want to stress-test your claims. They've seen countless environmental startups fail.

What They're Really Asking:

"What makes you different from all the others who tried and failed? Are you naive about the challenges?"

The Framework: **ACKNOWLEDGE** → **DIFFERENTIATE** → **EVIDENCE**

- Acknowledge the challenge exists (builds credibility)
- Explain what's changed that makes it possible now
- Provide concrete evidence of your progress

Tough Question #1

"Your technology sounds great in theory, but why hasn't anyone successfully scaled this before?"

Sample Answer:

"You're right to ask that—this has been a challenge for the industry. Several companies attempted this in the early 2020s but faced three main barriers: high energy costs, limited computing power for optimization, and lack of policy support.

Here's what's different now: energy costs have dropped 80% in the last decade, AI allows us to optimize processes in real-time, and we're seeing unprecedented regulatory support through initiatives, like the [Future Made in Australia Innovation Fund \(\\$1.5B\)](#): Administered by [ARENA](#) (&/OR the [Australia-Singapore Green Economy Agreement](#) &/OR if you are targeting Asia regional partnerships)

... More importantly, we've already proven this works. We've run a 6-month pilot with [credible partner], processed 500 tons of waste, and achieved a 40% cost reduction compared to incumbent solutions. Our technology isn't theoretical—it's operational and improving monthly."

What to Avoid:

- ✘ Getting defensive: "That's not fair—we're completely different!"
- ✘ Dismissing past failures: "Those companies just didn't execute well"
- ✘ Vague claims: "The timing is just right now"

Pro Tip: Name the previous failed attempts if you can because it shows you've studied the landscape and learned from others' mistakes. Then clearly articulate what your "unfair advantage" is.

Tough Question #2

"Your main competitor claims they can do this at half the cost. How do you respond?"



Why They Ask It:

Journalists love competitive tension—it makes for better stories. They also want to see how you handle pressure and whether you'll bad-mouth competitors.

What They're Really Asking:

"Are you overpriced? Can you defend your value proposition? How do you handle competitive pressure?"

The Framework: **ACKNOWLEDGE** → **DIFFERENTIATE** → **EVIDENCE**

- Show respect for competitors (never trash-talk)
- Clarify what you're actually comparing (apples/oranges)
- Refocus on value, not just price

Tough Question #2

"Your main competitor claims they can do this at half the cost. How do you respond?"

Sample Answer:

"I have a lot of respect for [competitor]—they're doing important work in this space. But it's critical to understand what we're actually comparing.

Their solution works well for [specific use case/condition], but it requires [limitation—e.g., specific feedstock, ideal conditions, manual oversight]. Our technology is designed for [different value proposition—e.g., variable feedstock, harsh conditions, autonomous operation].

When customers evaluate total cost of ownership—not just upfront price—our solution delivers 60% savings over five years because of lower maintenance, higher uptime, and better output quality. For clients who need [key benefit], the economics are compelling.

The market is large enough for multiple approaches. Different solutions will win in different segments."

What to Avoid:

- ✘ Attacking competitors: "They're lying about their numbers"
- ✘ Sounding defensive: "We're not actually more expensive when you consider..."
- ✘ Getting lost in technical details that obscure your point

Pro Tip: If you genuinely don't know your competitor's pricing or claims, say so: "I haven't seen their specific numbers, so I can't comment on their costs. What I can tell you is..." Then pivot to your value proposition.

Tough Question #3

"You're asking for \$50 million in funding while the planet is burning. Shouldn't this money go directly to planting trees or installing solar panels instead?"



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Why They Ask It:

Journalists often advocate for immediate action. They may be skeptical of "yet another startup" when proven solutions exist.

What They're Really Asking:

"Why should investors bet on unproven technology instead of scaling what already works? Justify your existence."

The Framework: **ACKNOWLEDGE** → **DIFFERENTIATE** → **EVIDENCE**

- Validate the concern (trees and solar are important)
- Explain, that the scale of the problem requires multiple solutions
- Show how your solution creates multiplier effects

Tough Question #3

"You're asking for \$50 million in funding while the planet is burning. Shouldn't this money go directly to planting trees or installing solar panels instead?"

Sample Answer:

"That's a fair challenge, and I completely agree—we need to deploy proven solutions like solar and reforestation at massive scale right now. But here's the reality: even if we deployed every existing solution perfectly, we'd still fall short of our climate targets by 2050. The IPCC says we need breakthrough technologies for hard-to-abate sectors like cement, steel, and aviation—which represent 30% of global emissions. Our technology addresses [specific hard-to-abate sector]. For every dollar invested in our development, we estimate we'll enable \$100 in emissions reductions across the industry once we reach scale. We're not replacing trees or solar—we're tackling the problems they can't solve. And yes, this requires upfront investment in R&D. But the alternative—continuing with fossil-based processes in these sectors—costs us far more in long-term climate damage."

What to Avoid:

- ✘ Dismissing proven solutions: "Solar is old technology"
- ✘ Sounding elitist: "We're working on the hard problems"
- ✘ Getting defensive about funding: "We need money to operate!"

Pro Tip: Use third-party validation (IPCC, IEA reports, academic studies) to show why breakthrough solutions are necessary. Personal opinion is weaker than institutional credibility.

Tough Question #4

"Your last pilot project failed.
What makes you think this time will be different?"



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Why They Ask It:

Journalists do their homework. They want to see how you handle failure and whether you've learned from it.

What They're Really Asking:

"Are you capable of learning and adapting? Should investors trust you with more capital?"

The Framework: **ACKNOWLEDGE** → **DIFFERENTIATE** → **EVIDENCE**

- Own the failure completely (no excuses)
- Explain specifically what you learned
- Detail how you've evolved the approach

Tough Question #4

"Your last pilot project failed.
What makes you think this time will be different?"

Sample Answer:

"You're absolutely right—our pilot in [location] didn't meet our targets, and I take full responsibility for that.

Here's what went wrong: We underestimated the variability in feedstock quality and overestimated our system's ability to handle impurities. We also chose a partner who was under financial pressure and couldn't provide consistent supply.

But here's what we learned: We've since redesigned our intake system with three additional filtering stages. We've implemented real-time quality monitoring that adjusts processing parameters automatically. And we've completely changed how we vet and structure partnerships—including financial health checks and contractual protections.

The result? Our second pilot in [location] has been running for eight months with 97% uptime and we're exceeding performance targets.

Failure taught us lessons that made our technology significantly more robust.

In deep tech, failure isn't unusual—it's part of the development process. What matters is whether you learn fast and adapt."

What to Avoid:

- ✘ Blaming others: "Our partner didn't hold up their end"
- ✘ Minimizing the failure: "It wasn't really a failure, just a learning experience"
- ✘ Getting too technical as a deflection tactic

Pro Tip: Investors and journalists respect founders who own failures and show tangible improvements. If possible, have a third party (customer, partner) validate that you've improved.

Tough Question #5

"Environmental regulations could change with the next election. Isn't your business model entirely dependent on government support?"



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Why They Ask It:

Political risk is real, and journalists want to know if your business can survive policy changes.

What They're Really Asking:

"Is this a subsidy-dependent house of cards? What happens when the political winds shift?"

The Framework: **ACKNOWLEDGE** → **DIFFERENTIATE** → **EVIDENCE**

- Show your business isn't dependent on one policy
- Explain the underlying economic fundamentals
- Position climate action as inevitable regardless of politics

Tough Question #5

"Environmental regulations could change with the next election. Isn't your business model entirely dependent on government support?"

Sample Answer:

"That's a critical question for any environmental business. Here's our approach to managing political risk:

First, we've diversified geographically. We operate in the EU, US, and three Asian markets—each with different political cycles. If one market softens on climate policy, we have growth in others.

Second, our business case doesn't depend solely on subsidies. At current scale, we're cost-competitive with fossil alternatives even without carbon credits or tax incentives. Policy support accelerates our growth, but it's not our foundation.

Third—and most importantly—the transition to clean technology is now driven by economics and corporate commitments as much as government policy. Companies like Microsoft, Amazon, and Unilever have made net-zero pledges that require solutions like ours, regardless of who's in office.

Could a policy reversal slow us down? Possibly in one market. But the global momentum is irreversible. Climate change doesn't care about election cycles, and the physics of warming haven't changed."

What to Avoid:

- ✘ Claiming politics don't matter: "We're policy-agnostic"
- ✘ Making partisan statements: "If party X wins, we're doomed"
- ✘ Overstating policy dependence: "We need these subsidies to survive"

Pro Tip: Quantify your policy exposure. "Policy incentives represent 15% of our revenue, and we're on track to be policy-independent by 2027" is much stronger than vague statements.

Tough Question #6

"You're a scientist/engineer, not a businessperson. Why should investors believe you can build a successful company?"



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Why They Ask It:

Journalists see countless brilliant technologists who struggle with business execution. It's a legitimate concern.

What They're Really Asking:

"Do you have the skills and self-awareness to lead a commercial venture? Have you surrounded yourself with the right team?"

The Framework: **ACKNOWLEDGE** → **DIFFERENTIATE** → **EVIDENCE**

- Acknowledge the challenge with confidence
- Highlight your business-side team and advisors
- Point to early commercial traction

Tough Question #6

"You're a scientist/engineer, not a business person. Why should investors believe you can build a successful company?"

Sample Answer:

"You're right that my background is in [science/engineering], and I'm not pretending to be an MBA. But here's what I've learned: successful deep tech companies need strong technical leadership AND strong business leadership.

That's why I recruited [Name], who was VP of Sales at [credible company] and brings 20 years of experience scaling industrial businesses.

Our CFO, [Name], previously raised \$200M+ for [company]. And our board includes [impressive names/backgrounds].

I focus on what I do best—ensuring our technology works and continues improving. They focus on customers, capital, and operations. I know what I don't know, and I've hired people smarter than me in those areas.

And our early results validate this approach: We've signed \$15M in LOIs with Fortune 500 customers, secured partnerships with [credible names], and attracted investors who've backed [successful companies].

Building a company is a team sport. I'm not trying to do everything myself."

What to Avoid:

- ❌ False bravado: "I can learn business—it's not rocket science"
- ❌ Defensiveness: "Some of the best founders were scientists"
- ❌ Vague team descriptions: "We have experienced advisors"

Pro Tip: If you don't yet have a strong business team, be honest about actively recruiting and show advisors/investors who are helping you. Self-awareness is attractive to journalists and investors.

Tough Question #7

"Your solution creates [byproduct/requires resource/has environmental impact]. Aren't you just shifting the problem elsewhere?"



Why They Ask It:

Journalists are trained to find contradictions. They want to expose "greenwashing" and ensure solutions don't create new problems.

What They're Really Asking:

"Have you done a full lifecycle analysis? Are you being honest about trade-offs?"

The Framework: **ACKNOWLEDGE** → **DIFFERENTIATE** → **EVIDENCE**

- Be completely transparent about the trade-off
- Quantify net environmental benefit
- Explain mitigation strategies

Tough Question #7

"Your solution creates [byproduct/requires resource/has environmental impact]. Aren't you just shifting the problem elsewhere?"

Sample Answer:

"That's an excellent question, and I'm glad you asked because transparency is critical in environmental technology.

You're right that our process requires [resource/creates byproduct]. We've conducted a full lifecycle analysis with [third-party validator], and here's what it shows:

For every ton of [input], our process generates [X amount] of [byproduct] BUT eliminates [Y amount] of [worse outcome]. The net result is an 85% reduction in carbon emissions compared to the conventional process and a 70% reduction in water usage.

On the [specific concern], we're implementing [specific mitigation]—we've partnered with [company] to recycle 90% of that byproduct into [secondary use]. Our goal is zero waste by 2027.

No solution is perfect, but the alternative—continuing with fossil-based processes—is far worse for the planet. We're committed to continuous improvement and full transparency about our impacts.“

What to Avoid:

- ❌ Hiding trade-offs: "That's not really a concern"
- ❌ Whataboutism: "The current solution is worse"
- ❌ Vague claims: "We minimize environmental impact“

Pro Tip: Having third-party lifecycle analysis gives you enormous credibility. If you don't have one yet, acknowledge you're working on it and share preliminary data.

Tough Question #8

"Your biggest customer is [fossil fuel company/controversial corporation]. How do you justify taking their money?"



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Why They Ask It:

Journalists love asking "gotcha" questions about ethical contradictions. Environmental audiences can be particularly sensitive to corporate partnerships.

What They're Really Asking:

"Are you compromising your values for money? Are you enabling greenwashing?"

The Framework: **ACKNOWLEDGE** → **DIFFERENTIATE** → **EVIDENCE**

- Acknowledge the tension with pragmatism
- Focus on actual environmental impact
- Explain your standards for engagement

Tough Question #8

"Your biggest customer is [fossil fuel company/controversial corporation]. How do you justify taking their money?"

Sample Answer:

"I understand why that partnership raises questions, and it's something we debated extensively as a team.

Here's our perspective: [Company] is responsible for X% of global emissions in [sector]. We can either refuse to work with them on principle and leave those emissions unchanged, or we can engage with them and actually reduce their environmental footprint.

Our work with them has eliminated [specific amount] of emissions annually—equivalent to taking [X cars] off the road. That's real impact.

That said, we do have standards. We won't work with companies unless they have credible net-zero commitments, board-level accountability for climate, and transparent reporting. We also require that our solutions create measurable, verifiable emissions reductions—not just carbon credits or offsets.

The climate crisis is too urgent for purity tests. We need to work with imperfect partners to drive change from within these industries. If they're willing to deploy real solutions, we're willing to help them—but on our terms."

What to Avoid:

- ✘ Being apologetic: "I know it looks bad, but..."
- ✘ Pure profit motive: "They pay well"
- ✘ Attacking the questioner: "That's naive thinking"

Pro Tip: If possible, have your controversial customer publicly commit to specific environmental targets that your solution enables. This shifts the narrative from "taking their money" to "holding them accountable."

Tough Question #9

"You've been working on this for 5 years and still haven't reached profitability. When will this actually make money?"



Why They Ask It:

Investors and journalists are impatient. They want to know if you're chasing a viable business or an expensive science project.

What They're Really Asking:

"Is this economically viable? Do you have a clear path to profitability, or are you just burning investor cash?"

The Framework: **ACKNOWLEDGE** → **DIFFERENTIATE** → **EVIDENCE**

- Provide context for development timeline
- Show clear milestones achieved
- Detail path to profitability with dates

Tough Question #9

"You've been working on this for 5 years and still haven't reached profitability. When will this actually make money?"

Sample Answer:

"Deep tech development takes time, and anyone promising overnight profitability in this space is either lying or building something trivial. For context, most successful climate tech companies take 7-10 years from founding to profitability. Tesla took 17 years. We're in year 5, and we're actually ahead of schedule based on industry benchmarks.

Here's what we've accomplished: We've moved from lab to pilot to commercial demonstration. We've reduced our cost per unit by 60% in two years. We've signed our first commercial contracts. And we're on track to reach gross margin positive in Q3 2026 and full profitability in 2028. Our current burn rate is \$4M per year, and we have 18 months of runway. We're raising our Series B now, which will take us to cash-flow positive.

Compare that to continuing with fossil-based processes—which have hidden costs in climate damage, health impacts, and environmental cleanup. Our 'time to profit' needs to be weighed against the cost of inaction."

What to Avoid:

- ✗ Vague timelines: "We'll be profitable soon"
- ✗ Blaming external factors: "If investors would give us more money..."
- ✗ Comparing yourself to outliers: "Amazon wasn't profitable for years!"

Pro Tip: Show improving unit economics over time (graphs work great for this). Demonstrate that each iteration gets closer to profitability, not further away.

Tough Question #10

"If your technology is so groundbreaking, why aren't the big players doing this already?"



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Why They Ask It:

Journalists are skeptical when small players claim to have solutions that major corporations missed.

What They're Really Asking:

"What do you know that ExxonMobil, Shell, or Siemens don't know? Are you delusional about your advantage?"

The Framework: **ACKNOWLEDGE** → **DIFFERENTIATE** → **EVIDENCE**

- Explain why incumbents can't or won't pursue this
- Provide evidence others are now following your lead
- Show this is part of a larger disruption trend

Tough Question #10

"If your technology is so groundbreaking, why aren't the big players doing this already?"

Sample Answer:

"That's actually a great question, and the answer reveals a lot about how innovation happens.

Large corporations excel at optimizing existing business models, but they struggle with disruptive innovation that cannibalizes current revenue. For [incumbent], our solution would threaten a \$500M annual business line. Their incentive is to extend the life of existing infrastructure, not replace it. We also have advantages they don't: We can move fast without bureaucracy. We can take technical risks they can't justify to shareholders. And we've assembled deep expertise specifically in [niche area] rather than spreading resources across dozens of priorities. That said, we're not alone anymore. In the last 18 months, [major company] launched a similar initiative, [company 2] acquired a competitor, and [company 3] is reportedly developing comparable technology. The fact that big players are now entering this space validates our thesis—we just got here first. This follows the classic pattern of disruption: small players prove a new approach, incumbents initially dismiss it, then eventually adopt or acquire. We're in the 'incumbents waking up' phase."

What to Avoid:

- ✘ Insulting incumbents: "They're too slow and bureaucratic"
- ✘ Claiming no one else can do this: "We have a monopoly on this approach"
- ✘ Ignoring competitive threats: "We have a 5-year head start"

Pro Tip: If major companies are entering your space, frame it as validation rather than competition. "We're thrilled to see [company] investing here—it proves the market is real" is powerful positioning.



Bonus Section:

Universal Response Frameworks

The Bridge Technique

When asked anything you don't want to answer directly:

"That's an important question, and [brief acknowledgment]. What I think is more important is [your key message]."

Example:

"Are you worried about [competitor]?"

"Competition keeps us sharp, and we respect what they're doing. What I think is more important is that the market is growing fast enough for multiple winners, and we're focused on delivering the best solution for our customers."



Bonus Section:

Universal Response Frameworks

The Flag Technique

When asked for speculation or information you don't have:

"I can't speak to [what you don't know], but what I can tell you is [what you do know]."

Example:

"Will you acquire [company]?"

"I can't comment on M&A speculation, but what I can tell you is that we're always looking for ways to accelerate our mission, whether through partnerships, acquisitions, or organic growth."



Bonus Section: Universal Response Frameworks

The Redirect Technique

When asked an off-topic or unfair question:

"I appreciate the question, but that's not really my area/focus. What I can speak to is [relevant topic]."

Example:

"What do you think about [political figure's] climate policy?"

"I appreciate the question, but I try to stay out of partisan politics. What I can speak to is the actual economics of clean energy, which now favor renewables regardless of policy."



Your Pre-Interview Checklist

24 Hours Before:

- Review these 10 questions and practice your answers out loud
- Prepare 3 key messages you want to convey no matter what
- Gather recent stats, case studies, and proof points
- Research the journalist and outlet (read their recent articles)
- Prepare 2-3 questions to ask them (shows engagement)

1 Hour Before:

- Review your key messages one more time
- Prepare soundbites (10-15 second quotable statements)
- Have water available (dry mouth kills interviews)
- Minimize distractions (close tabs, silence phone)
- Do a tech check for video interviews

During the Interview:

- Pause before answering (it's okay to think)
- Bridge back to your key messages regularly
- Use concrete examples and numbers (not vague claims)
- Show passion but stay calm
- It's okay to say, "I don't know" and follow up later



Your Post-Interview Protocols

After the Interview:

- Send follow-up email with any promised information
- Clarify anything you misspoke about
- Thank them for their time
- Share the article when published (journalists appreciate this)

Red Flags: When to Push Back

Journalists are generally fair, but sometimes you need to challenge:

▶ **"Can you give me a yes or no answer?"**

Response: "I appreciate you want a simple answer, but this topic deserves nuance. Here's what I can tell you..."

▶ **"Off the record, what do you really think about..."**

Response: Nothing is ever truly off the record. Assume everything is publishable.

▶ **"Your competitor told me [unverifiable claim]. Is that true?"**

Response: "I can't comment on what others may have told you, but here are the facts as I know them..."

▶ **"Isn't it true that [loaded assumption]?"**

Response: "I'd challenge the premise of that question. Here's the actual situation..."



Final Considerations

Confidence Comes From Preparation

Tough questions aren't attacks but opportunities.

Every challenging question is a chance to:

- Demonstrate expertise and credibility
- Address concerns proactively
- Differentiate yourself from competitors
- Show your values and integrity
- Build trust with your audience

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Projects to Be Seen.*

