

1. How would you describe the government culture around responding to formal questions from journalists?
2. Has it got more difficult to check facts or have questions answered, compared to previous years?
3. Are questions/ queries more likely to go unanswered compared to previous years?
4. If so, what difficulties does this pose for you as a working journalist?

**Response from Andrew Probyn, Political Editor, ABC News:**

There's nothing new about politicians and staffers – regardless of their political stripe - occasionally getting stroppy with journalists. It's the nature of the game in political journalism.

A media flak's first allegiance is usually to his or her boss, not to the journalist's yarn. You can expect the same with some government agencies.

I generally find my communications with media minders in the government courteous and civil, even if a small few cannot disguise their antipathy, either towards the Press Gallery or a particular news organisation (I have worked for three over 20-plus years in the Press Gallery: the ABC, *The West Australian* and the *Herald Sun*).

But the fact is, very few cracking stories ever come from answers to formal questions from journalists. And if I do have to approach a department, agency, government or opposition it is mostly as a courtesy or in expectation of a bland response.

In Australia, like many other countries, media management has become a professional dark art focused on control of information, containment and protection.

Navigating around the media matrix is the challenge.

A shrinking press corps is too often up against ever-expanding bureaucracies that spend massive amounts of time and energy attempting to tell journalists as little as possible, particularly if they fear their story might illuminate an embarrassment.