



This guide has been designed to help you understand the basic technique for conducting television interviews

Arranging The Studio

When choosing a room that is to be your temporary 'studio' try to find a reasonably large room away from any noise and distractions. Remember, there will be at least another 4 people in the room as well as yourself also the crew will need space to set up lights and cameras as well as storing flight cases. Ideally, switch off any air conditioning as this tends to affect the sound quality. Also a room without windows is preferred as this allows more creativity with the lighting unless of course the window is to be used as a feature or for effect..

Avoid using swivel chairs - guests swinging from side to side during the interview can be very irritating and distracting for the TV viewer.

Only those people who are directly involved with the interview should be present on the set; any other people present can be very intimidating for the guest and may stifle the conversation and prevent the guest from being free with their comments and views. Also other prospective interviewees should not be present in the same room otherwise the temptation will be for them to 'crib' and give similar answers to your previous guest.

As you direct the guest to their seat on the set please warn them that there maybe cables and tripods laying around which may pose possible safety hazards so be mindful when moving around the set.

As they get themselves settled they will be 'miked-up' by the sound recordist. This will mean attaching a small microphone to their clothing. Often the cable is hidden under their clothes. They should be reminded that they are attached to cables running to the camera and so should resist moving off the set until the microphone is disconnected by the Soundman.

They may be required to have some make-up applied to their face; assure them that this is normal practice and prevents them 'shining' in front of the lights. This is more important when shooting in High Definition as every bead of perspiration will become more obvious.

Whilst this is happening continually re-assure your guest that this is quite normal; also whilst you are talking informally to your guest the Sound Recordist will be adjusting the audio recording levels prior to filming so it's good practice to talk to your guest and get them to respond so that these levels can be checked.

The Cameraman may make some last minute adjustments to the lighting or the camera angle during this settling in period.

You (as the interviewer) may also be required to wear a microphone so that your questions can be recorded even if they are not to be used in the final programme, this helps identify the questions during the process of audio transcription. Don't forget that you will also be attached to the camera via a microphone cable.



Prior to filming

People often feel nervous and worried about appearing on television and having to give a perfect performance in front of the camera. It's your job as the interviewer to try to put them at ease so they can relax as much as possible, so it's worth taking some time to chat with them and reassure them in a calm, relaxed professional manor. Explain that they do not have to be an actor but that you simply wish them to be themselves. Don't try to launch straight into the interview, instead ask them about themselves, what do they do for a living, what are their hobbies and interests, how was their journey to the studio. Hopefully this will go some way towards breaking the ice and you'll get more out of the interview as a result.

To put your guest at ease it's worth explaining to them the set up and maybe even introduce them to your crew, that way they become a part of the event. The crew will also help you in your task of making the guest feel an important part of the team.

Always remove any name badge that the guest may be wearing as sometimes it may be necessary to flip the picture in the edit suite. Obviously, anything in vision which has writing or logos will prevent flipping the picture. Be aware of anything in the background that may prevent manipulating the picture at a later date. Sometimes this is not possible as in the case of guests wearing T-shirts with text or logos on.

Make a note of the guests name and their designation or speciality— this will help identify them in the edit suite and allow the editor to caption them. Check the spelling of their names (e.g. Stephen or Steven) and make sure this information is sent to the edit suite. A good way to do this is when the camera starts to record, ask the guest their name and position and get them to spell out their name if there is any doubt. Sometimes shooting their business card will help log the recording.

Explain that your questions will not necessarily be used in the final programme so they should try to incorporate your question in their answer otherwise the viewer may not understand the context of the answer.

e.g. Q. *How did you get to the studio today?*
A. *Train!*

This answer will mean nothing to the viewer when taken out of the context of the question and so will be unusable in the programme.

Q. *How did you get to the studio today?*
A. *Today I caught the train to get here to the studio.*

Now the viewer will understand the answer even when the question is removed.

Explain to the guest that you will not be able to talk once you have asked your question but that you will acknowledge their responses by nodding your head or smiling.

As the interviewer, you must resist the temptation to use any form of verbal acknowledgement as this will render the answer useless. So using: *"that's right"* or *"that's interesting"* or *"...hummmm..."* *"yes..."* *"great"* *"lovely"* coughs, or laughs etc is a definite NO, NO !



The Interview – just before starting

- Just before commencing the recording remind your guest that they must look directly at you and not towards the camera and to ignore the crew and other people in the room. It's important that you maintain eye contact with your guest at all times.
- Remind your guest to keep looking at you after the interview is complete and not to ask if it was okay. This is a natural reaction as they seek re-assurance that they have performed well and given you the answers you require.
- Tell your guest that if there is anything that they are unhappy with then to pause and ask that they re-take the question but explain that they should finish off what they are saying first - you never know it could be exactly the answer you were looking for. Always re-ask the question so that there is a clean start to the answer.

The Interview – asking the right questions

An informal interview should appear like a conversation between friends but there are some useful techniques to follow:

- Always ask OPEN QUESTIONS– this encourages full answers, for example, begin your question with:
What....? Why....? How...? When.....? Tell me about....?
- Do not talk over your guest - let them do all the talking! If you interrupt or talk over their answer then that becomes unusable in the edit suite.
- Explain that there needs to be a second or so between your conversations this allows the editor to cut out the questions. A good practice is to ask your guest to take a breath before answering. They can take as much 'thinking time' as they wish before answering. The pauses can be edited out later. It's also good practice for you to pause before asking your next question. This gives time to employ a visual effect such as a visual fade or a mix if required.
- Listen to what your guest is saying. This may seem obvious but you'd be surprised how often the interviewer is so engrossed in the next question that they miss the gem that they might have picked up on. Don't be afraid to go 'off-track' and pick up on an interesting comment, you never know where it might lead.
- If the answer is interesting but far too long, re-ask the question but request that they shorten the answer and summarise the points they have made.
- Have the confidence to repeat the question if they didn't give you the answer you were looking for. Occasionally it helps to give a gentle prompt as to what you were expecting in the answer.
- Resist the temptation to do a 'Jeremy Paxman' and press for answers - only he can get away with it!!



The Interview — ask the right questions

- Stay in control of the interview - you must direct the interview. If the guest starts to deviate from the topic being discussed then at an appropriate point stop them and re-direct the question. Asking the same question in a slightly different way sometimes helps.
- Usually, in an interview, the first couple of answers are not very good as the guest is still a little nervous and apprehensive. After a while the guest will become more comfortable and settle into the interview so it's best to leave the important questions until near the end of the session. You can always go back and re-ask earlier questions, you may find you get a better response after the guest has warmed up.

The Interview — start the filming

- When you are ready to start the interview ask the cameraman and the soundman if they are ready to begin. If there is a positive response then call for the cameraman to **“TURNOVER”** and then wait for him to reply with **“SPEED”** or **“STEADY”** or **“ACTION”** this means that the camera is running and you are clear to commence the interview with your first question which should be:

“Please tell me your full name and the position you currently hold (or where you are from)”

In all probability this will not be used in the programme but it logs the guest's name on the tape so that they can be easily identified by the editor at a later date and allows the soundman to make any final adjustments to the microphone levels.

You can now continue with the interview.

When you have finished, pause and then say **“CUT”** this gives everyone a clear indication that the interview has finished or that there is to be a brief pause in the interview.

- At the end of the interview, but before releasing your guest, ask that they stay seated until the microphone is taken off them. It is a natural reaction for them to jump straight up to walk off set. At this stage remind them that they are still attached by a cable to the camera.
- Check with both Camera and Sound that they are happy and that there are to be no re-takes due to any extraneous noises or problems with vision. They will reply **“Sound and vision clear!”**
- You may then thank your guest and escort them off the set reminding them of possible safety hazards such as cables etc. along the way. Do not promise to supply a copy of the interview to the guest as it may not be possible.