
INTERVIEWING

One of the most interesting formats in radio programming

What is an interview?

- a means of providing facts, reasons or opinions on a particular topic so that the listener can form a conclusion as to the validity of what's being said.
- it's a spontaneous event - any hint of rehearsal damages interviewees credibility. The listener may think it's 'fixed'.
- questions and answers for the benefit of the eavesdropping listener.
- an opportunity to provide listener with what he wants to know and sometimes what he may need to know.

NB - An interview is not a discussion. Interviewer shouldn't get drawn in to answering questions, or giving opinions.

When do you interview?

- when you've done your research! It's embarrassing otherwise. Need to have sufficient background information on the subject and the interviewee. May be done long before the interview or just before interview.
- when you know what you want to achieve with the interview. Is it to establish facts, or to discuss reasons? Don't let interview ramble along - it needs to have direction.
- when you know what the key questions are. That doesn't mean having every question worked out though - (*see 'How do you actually do it?'*)

Why do you interview?

- people are interested in people — people who are like them and people who are not like them!
- two voices are often better than one — brings variety to the programme
- good way of getting the expert involved. You can ask them what you (or the listener) want to know.
- brings in human interest - sometimes it's easier to present ideas subjectively in persons experience

Who should you interview?

- people with authority about the subject BUT make sure they're interesting!
- people most closely involved in the matter.

How long should the interview last?

- as long as it's interesting! But of course you will need to know what kind of time slot it needs to fit into.
- for interviews 3-5 minutes there's no point recording 20 minutes worth with a view to cutting it later. That is very hard work. Better to:
“sharpen one's mind beforehand, rather than one's razor-blade afterwards” (Robert Mcleish)
- therefore need to have a good sense of timing, need to have a clock running in your head (figuratively speaking of course!) If you hear an answer that's unusable then mentally stop the clock. Takes time to develop this skill but it will come with practice.

Where should you do an interview?

- Preferably in the studio.
- However, if you do need to go elsewhere beware of unwanted noises, such as ticking clocks, central heating clicking, telephones etc.
- Be aware of the acoustics. If possible avoid hard smooth surfaces such as windows, desk tops, lino floors or plastered walls.
- Better to use a carpeted room with curtains and other furnishings
- If you can't avoid bad acoustics try to work as close to the mic as is comfortable and adjust your recording levels.
- Make sure the background noise is constant, if there is any. Otherwise it will be distracting and make editing very hard. No Music in background.

How do you actually do it?

- Be in control of the interview
- Have planned opening question and maybe closing one but apart from that your questions should flow naturally out of the interviewees answers **THEREFORE** it's vital that you listen! Mustn't be so rigid as to only ask pre-set questions. Interview will sound wooden and might not even make sense, because your set question may be totally unrelated to their previous answer!

“An interviewers greatest skill lies in discovering something within each answer which provides a stepping stone to the next question” - Anon

“The great great rule of interviewing is how to listen. It’s the interviewer listening really attentively to what’s being said, and picking up clues about the way the interviewee is prepared to go, and what he’s prepared to talk about” - David Dimbleby

- Treat interviewee with respect.

“Whoever I’m talking to is the most important person at that moment” - Alan Wicker

- Keep your own opinions and prejudices to yourself. You should be representing all types of listeners not just ones like yourself.

What type of questions should you ask?

The type underlined in the headings of these notes. What, Why, Where , When, Who etc . Open questions that give scope for full answers. Try to avoid questions beginning:

Are you...?

Is it.....?

Will they..?

Do you....?

Such questions lead to “Yes” or “No” answers. That may be what you want, in order perhaps to clarify something, but generally avoid them.

APPROACHES TO INTERVIEWING

There are a number of different approaches to interviewing. Not all approaches are appropriate in all circumstances, and it is important to know which approach is the right one for any given interview.

The different approaches might best be described using the questions that would characterise them:

- 1) **FACTUAL:** What happened?
- 2) **EXPLANATORY:** Why did it happen? How did it happen?
- 3) **EMOTIONAL OR HUMAN INTEREST:** How did you feel when it happened?
- 4) **COMMENT:** What are your feelings about what happened?
- 5) **CONJECTURAL:** What do you think will happen next?
- 6) **INVESTIGATIVE:** Why did you do that?

THE TRIANGLE OF TRUST

This is absolutely essential in an interview:

- a) The interviewer must trust the interviewee to give honest answers

- b) The interviewee must trust the interviewer to ask questions that keep to the original statement of intent regarding the subject areas. Also he must trust that the interviewer will edit the material in such a way that it will maintain the spirit, context and content of the interview.

- c) The interviewer must trust the listener to accept that his questions are valid and good.

- d) The listener must trust the interviewer to act fairly in his interests, and trust that there is no secret agreement between the interviewer and interviewee to deceive the listener.

- e) The interviewee must trust the listener to believe him and not to misrepresent what he's saying.

- f) The listener must trust the interviewee to give honest answers.

If any one side of this triangle is broken i.e.: if the listeners no longer trust the interviewer, or the interviewees no longer trust the interviewers or neither have any regard for the listener, there is a danger that the process will be seen simply as a propaganda exercise.

***“Every time a broadcaster misrepresents, every time an interviewee lies or a listener disbelieves, we have lost something of genuine value”
R Mcleish***