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# THE RADIO INTERVIEW

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Both as a format on its own and as a part of other formats, the interview is one of the most useful tools in radio.

The interview is one of the most valuable parts of radio. It can give a voice to even the most inexperienced person (in radio terms). A good interviewer can take someone with no previous radio experience, and help them to communicate their point of view.

The interview also helps to make use of the personal nature of radio. The interviewer becomes the representative of the listener, and allows them to hear what interests them from people they would otherwise probably never meet. In other words; ask questions the listener would want to ask.

The interviewer has the difficult job of encouraging the interviewee to speak, yet at the same time retaining control of the interview.

## THE INTERVIEWEE COMES FIRST

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The whole aim of the interview format is to give the interviewee a chance to speak, or even to persuade him to speak. It is natural therefore that the interviewee should be the most important person, and the interview should be so conducted that he gives of his best.

## TRUST

Of primary importance in an interview is the relationship between interviewer and interviewee. The quality of this relationship will to a large extent govern the results of the interview. Yet these two people are not the only ones involved. There is also the listener; if he is excluded from this relationship he will lose interest. The relationship between all three should be a 'triangle of trust' where each trusts the others.

## LISTEN

Many famous interviewers have said that the key to their success is that they learned to listen well to the interviewee.

The great rule of interviewing is how to listen. It's the interviewer is 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.

There can be much to distract the interviewer whilst an interview is in progress, but listening must come first. However do not concentrate so much that you forget your next question.

An unwatched machine may sometimes let you down; an interviewee who senses that you are only half listening will always let you down. Elwyn Evans.

## GIVE

It can be a great temptation for the well known (or not so well known) interviewer to consider himself more important than the interviewee. The interviewer should rather be willing to put the interviewee first and get the best from him.

The interviewee may often need to be prepared for their interview. He may need to be set at his ease, and possibly the more technical aspects explained, such as not moving around in the chair too much, or not clicking a biro. The interviewee will need to know in advance the general subject of

the interview, and the areas in which questions might be asked, as he may need to use facts and figures in his answer. He may need to agree to be questioned on certain sensitive issues. What cannot be done is to let him have the questions in advance.

The interviewer must also conduct the interview in such a way as to let the interviewee be heard. The questions asked are important. They should be short and clear, giving space to the interviewee. Only one question should be asked at a time, therefore avoid the word 'and'. The interviewer should resist the temptation to sum up what the interviewee has said, or to put words into his mouth. The interviewer should do everything possible to stay out of sight, even avoiding 'grunts' or saying 'yes, yes' whilst the interviewee is talking. It is quite possible to encourage and show you are listening without making a sound. Use a smile or a nod of the head.

*Whoever you are talking to is the most important person in the world at that moment. Alan Whicker.*

## THE INTERVIEWER IN CONTROL

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It is the responsibility of the interviewer at all times to be in control of the interview. This control depends on a number of different areas; aim, preparation, question technique, and timing.

### AIM

A good interview will have a simple and well defined aim. This will help the interviewer to concentrate on how to draw out the interviewee. If an aim has not been established it is only too easy for the interview to diverge away from the point, and get lost.

However, this aim must not be so rigid that the interviewer cannot pick up an important side issue that may appear during the interview.

### PREPARATION

Do your homework, the interviewer needs to be well prepared for each interview. But this preparation should not take the form of rehearsal. Spontaneity is one of the great strengths of a good interview.

Research is most important in preparing for an interview. The subject of the interview should be researched, so that the interviewer understands the issues involved and is aware of the sort of answers that might be given. It is particularly important in some forms of interview that the interviewer gets his facts right. It can also help if research can produce an idea of the key questions that may need to be asked. Know who the interviewee is, their correct title and position in relation to the interview.

In preparation, it is not at all good to write out questions to be used in the interview. Notes may help, and a possible opening and closing question too, as these are the hardest. More than this can stifle the interview before it happens.

### QUESTION TECHNIQUE

When framing questions, it is important to ask questions which will give the answer desired. It is easy to diverge from this, either by asking questions with yes/no answers like <169>Are you English? or by asking questions that are too broad, such as <169>Tell me about cows.

This is not to say that there is no place for such questions in some interviews, but in the main it is good to ask questions based on; Who? When? Where? What? How? and Why? Such questions tend to give more Interview

detailed and interesting answers. <169>Why questions in particular can prove most revealing and interesting.

Question technique will very much depend on the interviewee. In some cases the interviewer's task is to draw out the interviewee and get him to talk, whilst in other cases, questions need to be precisely framed to keep the interviewee on track.

In Genesis chapter 3 good and bad question technique is seen in contrast. Satan asks inverted (yes/no) questions, but God asks where, who, and what.

## KEEPING CONTROL

The need to keep control of an interview depends largely on the interviewee and on the type of interview. In all cases however the interviewer should be in control.

Control may mean having to break in to what the interviewee is saying, politely, and putting the interview back on course. This is particularly true when interviewing people with strong feelings on an issue, such as politicians.

Control may also mean making sure that the question is not dodged. Yet not being obstinate. Generally if an interviewee avoids answering a question twice, the audience will realise that they have something to hide, and the point is made.

## TIMING

In most forms of interview, the timing of the interview is important, and the interviewer should be constantly aware of how time is going.

**Sharpen your mind before... not your razor blade after.** *Robert McLeish.*

Being able to control timing will mean that the interviewer, whilst giving full attention to what is being said, will be able to know how time is passing, and plan his questions accordingly.

For a two minute interview, record about three minutes - not twenty. For a five minute interview record seven or eight minutes - not twenty, and defiantly not only four minutes!

**Be polite**, even if the proposed interviewee is rude and refuses an immediate interview. You may need to interview them again at a later date, and if you are rude to them they may decline you when they are ready!

**BE SENSITIVE**, especially in times of stress, or the loss of a loved one. Current and up to date timing is essential in most programmes, and very important in sports programmes. It is no good interviewing someone about a race won five years ago.

## HINTS

As in any interview you need to check your equipment, before you leave for a location interview. Even for a studio interview you must check the after record. It is very embarrassing, or it may not be possible, to ask someone to do another interview because of an error that could have been rectified.

If possible, have the interviewee say their name and official position on tape before the interview. This will help in the correct pronunciation of their name, and will help in editing when you have more than one interview on the tape. But more important, it makes sure that the machine is working and enables you to check your level.

## APPROACHES TO INTERVIEWING

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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, and to use it.

The different approaches might best be described using questions that would characterize them.

- **FACTUAL:**

What happened?

- **EXPLANATORY:**

Why did it happen? How did it happen?

- **EMOTIONAL or HUMAN INTEREST:**

How did you feel when it happened?

- **COMMENT:**

What are your feelings about what happened?

- **CONJECTURAL:**

What do you think will happen next?

- **INVESTIGATIVE:**

Why did you do that? (Often asked of public servants or businessmen.)