

**TIPS ON INTERVIEWING FOR TELEVISION (excerpt)**

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So as not to bury the lede: **rule number one is to LISTEN.** More on that later.

**GENERAL TIPS**

**Know as much as you can going in.** Know the story well, so that you can ask smart questions and follow-ups.

**Make a list of questions.** But don't look at it once you start the interview. During the actual interview, follow your instincts. Maintain eye contact and engage the interviewee to show that you're listening. Refer to your list only if you get stuck – and then use it at the end of the interview to make sure you didn't miss anything.

**Tip:** Have a few “throwaway” questions in mind – questions you don't really need. There are two good places to use these: one is at the beginning of an interview – to get the guest warmed up and comfortable in front of the camera; the other is if you get to a slow point in the interview and need to stall while you figure out how to regain control of the interview.

**Don't be intimidated.** When you're getting started in this business, it's easy to be self-conscious about conducting interviews. Do your homework beforehand, go in prepared, and stay in control of your interview. Know what you hope to get out of the interview and ask directed questions that will get you what you need.

**Starting your interview.** Always start by asking the subject to say (for pronunciation) and spell (for CGs) their first and last names – and to give you their title and affiliation, if appropriate. Go over the basics with them – tell them to look at you, not the camera; and if it's a taped interview, remind them of that fact: if they don't like the way they said something, they can stop and start over.

**Develop an internal clock.** Know how long your bites need to be. In a 2 minute piece, sound bites are typically 10-13 seconds long. In a 3 to 4 minute piece, aim for bites that are no longer than 15-20. Pay attention to sound during the interview: if you get a bite you like, but it feels long, ask the question again.

**Ask open-ended questions.** Don't ask questions that can be answered with a simple “yes” or a “no.” Start questions with words like “how” or “why,” and you'll get complete answers. If you ask a question like, “are you upset?” you'll get an answer like “Oh, yes. Very.” If you ask, “How are you feeling?,” you're more likely to get a thoughtful response – in their own words. Your questions can be short – one of my colleagues says his favorite follow-up question is: “Really?”

**Listen.** To everything. Listen for strong sound; for soundbites that aren't too long; for statements that need qualification; for facts that aren't really facts; for inconsistencies in their stories; for opportunities to get color or emotion from them; for a closing thought.

**Your last question.** Should always be “is there anything I didn’t ask that I should have? Anything you’d add?” You’d be surprised how often you get a great thought this way.

**Transcribe everything.** Whenever possible, I’m a strong believer in transcribing *entire* interviews. Some people say that’s nuts. Personally, I think it helps cement details and information in your mind. At the very least, you should *listen* to your entire interview. I’ve found a lot of great bites on tape that I didn’t realize were the best bites during the interview. You can find ways to write in and out of almost any thought – including sentence fragments, which you sometimes don’t notice when you’re doing the interview.



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