
Interviews

Preparation

- Contacting and making arrangements with the guest(s)
- Choosing a location
- Preparing equipment
- Traveling to the location and setting up
- Final briefing and technical checks

Interview Structure

A video interview can be thought of as a conversation involving three types of people:

- The **interviewer** is the facilitator.
 - (S)he chooses the topic of conversation, asks questions and guides the discussion.
- The **guest** is the subject of the interview.
 - (S)he will do most of the talking and get most of the camera shots.
- The **viewer** is a silent observer who has been invited into the conversation.
- This creates a three-way interaction. A successful interview will include all three groups in the correct mix.

Interview structure

- Typically, the interviewer begins by setting the scene.
 - They invite the viewer into the conversation by introducing the location, guest and topic.
 - At this point the interviewer is probably speaking to the camera as if they were looking the viewer in the eye.
- Next, the interviewer turns to speak to the guest.
- Then follows a fairly one-sided conversation in which the interviewer asks questions which are (usually) designed to encourage the guest to talk a lot.

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- The way the interview progresses will depend on the situation.
 - A short vox-pop style interview will last long enough to get the information from the guest and then close, often quite abruptly.
 - A more in-depth or personal interview will usually go through a settling-in stage where simple facts are discussed, then move gently towards the more thorny issues.
 - The interview is usually concluded by thanking the guest.
 - The interviewer may then turn back to the camera and say goodbye to the viewer, as well as tidy up any script requirements such as leading to the next piece in the program.

Framing Interview Shots

- In most cases the subject (interviewer or guest) is facing slightly left or right of the camera.
 - This shows that the subject is talking to someone else (not the viewer), but by being relatively front-on the viewer is still part of the conversation.
- A big part of video interviews is making sure the interviewer and guest are always facing the "right way" so they are talking to each other.
 - If they are facing the same way they will both appear to be talking to an unseen third person.
- Avoid severe profile shots — you should always be able to see both eyes.



Common Interview Shots

- Interviews tend to use shots ranging from mid-shot to medium close-up (MCU).
- Wider shots are occasionally used as establishing shots or cutaways.

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- Shots ranging from wide shot to MCU are best for information delivery, i.e. when the subject is talking about factual information.
 - Shots tighter than a MCU are appropriate for when the guest is talking about something personal or emotional
 - The shot pulls the viewer into the same emotional space.
 - For this reason it's not usually a good idea to go tighter than a MCU on the interviewer, since their feelings are not the focus.

The Sequence of Shots : Start

- Start with a fairly loose shot of the interviewer and/or guest.
- Make sure you leave enough room for a name/title key if necessary.
- It's usually best to have similar framing for both interviewer and guest at the beginning of the interview.
- As the interview progresses the relative framing can vary.

Common practice

- Begin the interview with a mid-shot as the guest talks about the facts
- Then slowly zoom in to a close up when the guest begins talking about their feelings.
- This technique is popular in current affairs programs and documentaries.
- Don't drag the close-up on for too long — after a while it becomes uncomfortable.

Use appropriate framing.

- If the guest starts using hand gestures, zoom or cut to a shot which includes them (if possible).
- If the interview is to be closely edited with other interviews or content, make sure your shots will match as necessary.
- And remember: Wider shots for information and casual conversation, tighter shots for intensity.

Composing Interview Shots

- Set the interview in an appropriate location, perhaps with relevant background features.
- It's often desirable to make the background appear to be the guest's normal surroundings.
- If you're outside you could use an identifiable building or landmark; if you're inside you could use photos, logos, etc.

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- Lighting can help set the mood.
 - For example, soft low-temperature light for an intimate feel or harsh light for a confrontational approach.

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- The position and framing of interviewer and guest can affect the perceived relationship.
 - For example, having the interviewer behind a desk can provide a sense of authority.
 - If there are props involved you may be able to place them in front of the interview so they can be shown whenever they are talked about.

Backgrounds

- Check the background and make sure there's nothing distracting from the person speaking.
 - An object which appears to be growing out of the guest's head.
 - sign in the background with some letters obscured to make an unwanted new word.
- Try to have something in the background which suits or supports the interview (e.g. a landmark, monument, etc).



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- An interview is more comfortable to watch if the subjects appear to be the same height.
 - It is very important to make sure the guest's eyes are level with the interviewer's.
 - Any noticeable difference makes the interview look uncomfortable, and may even give an unwanted message (such as dominant and submissive appearances).

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- In studio situations, chairs are adjusted to make everyone the same height.
 - In the field you may need to be a bit more inventive. The audience need never know the true height relationship.

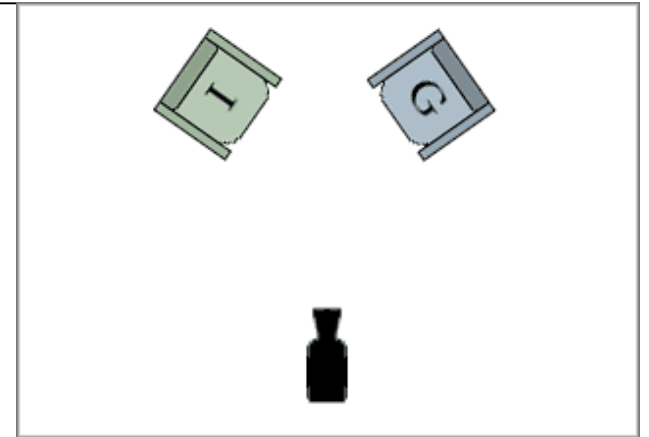


Studio Interview Settings

- There are many possible settings for conducting interviews.
- The first one to become familiar with is the seated interview.
- Whether it be in a permanent studio or someone's living room, you need to arrange the interviewer, guest(s) and cameras to achieve the look and feel which best suits your objectives.

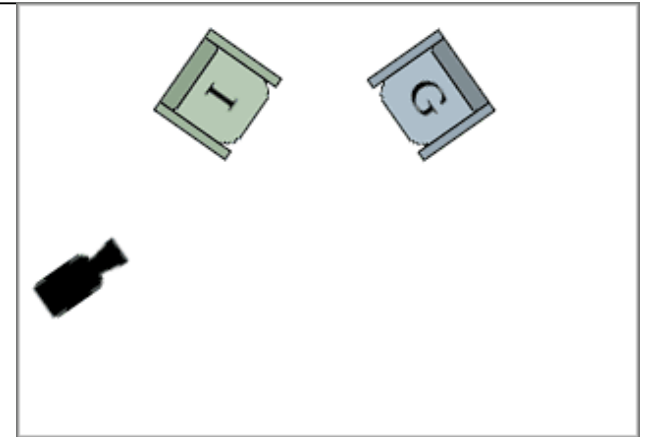
1 Guest, 1 Camera

- Interviewer and guest are given the same framing and appear with equal prominence.
- This is useful if you aren't sure who will be doing most of the talking, or if the talk-time is spread evenly between the interviewer and guest.
- It is a fairly casual setting, especially suitable for less formal interviews.



1 Guest, 1 Camera

- The guest becomes the main focus.
- The interviewer can face the camera at the beginning and end of the interview, but not usually during.
 - This leaves the interviewer with profile framing so your 1-shots will be reserved for the guest.
 - From time to time you can zoom out to a 2-shot, then back in to the guest.
- If the IV is to be edited, you will probably frame most of the interview on the guest.
- At the conclusion of the interview, move the camera to the other side and shoot the back-cut questions and noddies.



Mobile Interviewing Techniques

- **Shoulder-Mounted Camera**
 - This is the most common technique for field shoots in which speed and efficiency are important.
 - A minimum of equipment is required and the production team can move around quickly and easily.
 - It is also a useful method if the surroundings are likely to be included in the interview.
 - Because the camera operator is so mobile, (s)he can move around and show objects and scenery as they are talked about.
 - They are less formal, less restricted, and involve more movement than tripod/pedestal interviews.



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- The camera situated just to the side of the interviewer.
 - This gives a nice front-on shot of the guest.
 - The interviewer and camera should be close together so the guest is facing just slightly off-camera.
 - News stories tend to be quite static, concentrating on what the guest has to say and minimizing distractions.
 - Programmes which are more entertainment-focused may include a lot more variety, with the camera operator moving around and showing different angles of the guest, presenter and surroundings.

Tripod-Mounted Camera

- Nice steady shots - important if the interview will be edited alongside other tripod-mounted shots.
- You are much more restricted in terms of movement and framing.



Walking and Talking

- The interviewer and guest stroll side-by-side toward the camera.
- The camera operator walks backwards maintaining a constant distance.
- Obviously this must be well planned.
 - The camera operator should have someone to act as a guide — the usual routine is for the guide to place their hand in the middle of the operator's back and walk with them.



Field Kit Checklist

- Camera, tripod and plenty of tapes
- Batteries/power + multiboxes and extension leads
- Microphones
- Audio mixer, headset and leads
- Lights, stands and gels
- Video Monitor
- White balance cards
- Shot-log sheets, pen, etc.

Vox Pops: voice of the people

- Snapshot of public opinion.
 - Ask people "in the street" simple questions about the topic.
 - These people will be new to interviews and will often be nervous, flustered, giggly, etc.
- When asking people to participate, fast is best.
 - Use a short, sharp standard question such as "Would you mind answering a couple of quick questions about genetically modified food for TV3 news tonight?".



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- As always, ask open-ended questions but you must be specific enough to obtain brief answers.
 - Camera shots are usually framed as an MCU or close up.
 - Get an equal number of left-facing and right-facing subjects.
 - Accurate mix of genders and races are represented, appropriate to the population being surveyed.

Microphones

- Hand-Held Mics
 - They are well-suited to mobile interviews, and to situations where the interviewer needs to direct the talking (people can only speak when the interviewer points the mic at them)
 - You can use a voice recorder, cell phone...
- Lapel Mic
 - High quality, consistent sound.
 - Each person has their own mic, the mics are (theoretically) always in the correct position and unwanted noise is rejected well.
 - slower and more difficult to set up
- Built-in Camera Mic
 - unlikely to produce good interview sound
- Wear headphones to monitor sound recording during interview



Audio Traps to Avoid

- Many people begin their sentences loudly then tail off. You may need to compensate.
- Beware microphone handling noise, especially with cheap mics and inexperienced presenters.
- If wind is a problem, use a sock or (preferably) shield the mic.
- Background music means death in the edit suite. Turn any background music off.

Lighting: If You Have Your Own Lights

- Shooting outside
 - If the natural light is sufficient there may be no need to add artificial light.
 - If the sun is too strong you could find a shady location.
- Shooting inside
 - Find the best location - ideally a room with plenty of space and the ability to control existing light.
 - Unless you have a good reason to use existing light sources, try to eliminate them all (close curtains, turn off lights, etc).
 - Then set up your own lights.



If You Have No Lighting

- you are limited to the available light.
- This is where a reflector board can be a lifesaver.
- Improvise with other reflective objects.

- Shooting outside
 - If the sun is low, be careful not to make the guest squint.
 - Strong sunlight creates strong shadows which can be balanced with a reflector.

- Shooting inside
 - Try to avoid mixed lighting, e.g. sunlight through a window mixed with artificial light.
 - Overhead lights aren't desirable as they create ugly shadows on the face.
 - If they are all you have you may be able to balance them with a reflector.



Preparing for editing

- Cutting Between Interviewer and Guest
- The most common edit is the cut between shots of interviewer and guest
 - live cuts between cameras
 - post-production edits
- The natural instinct is to cut exactly between the end of a question and the beginning of the answer.
 - However this tends to look stilted.
 - Try cutting a little before or after the question/answer is complete.

Back-Cut Questions

- Concentrate your framing on the guest during the interview.
- Then when the interview has finished you reposition the camera to face the interviewer and shoot them asking the questions again.
 - The interviewer is in exactly the same position as they were during the IV, facing the empty space where the guest was (which is of course out of shot).
 - These shots are then inserted into the interview over the original questions.
 - Record the back-cut questions exactly the same as they were asked
 - make notes during the IV
 - Make sure your positioning and eye lines are consistent, as well as microphone placement.

Noddies

- Shot of the interviewer reacting to the guest. The interviewer may be nodding, smiling, frowning, looking concerned, etc.
 - To include the interviewer and show their reactions.
 - To provide edit points.
 - give emotional cues to the viewer
- Shot in the same way as the back-cut questions.
 - The interviewer faces the same direction and provides a series of nods, smiles and any other expressions relevant to the interview.
- In the edit suite, whenever you need to remove a segment of the guest's speech you simply inset a noddy to cover the edit.
 - Obviously the noddy must be appropriate

Some More Rules

- Create clean lead-in and lead-out space, and include information about the IV content.
 - At the beginning of the IV have the presenter record a brief intro and 3-second countdown, leaving the "one" silent, e.g:
 - "IV with John Smith regarding environmental contamination, starting in 3... 2.... (silence)..."
 - The interviewer then begins the actual interview on "zero".

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- At the conclusion of the interview, pause and don't move.
 - This stops the guest from immediately looking or walking away, providing you with enough time to mix or wipe away to the next shot.

 - Keep an eye on looking room and direction.
 - everyone is facing the right way.

General Tips

- The KISS Principle: keep it simple.
- Dealing with Newbie Guests
 - "Just treat it as a normal conversation. The best thing you can do to look good for the cameras is to ignore them."
 - "Don't worry if you make a mistake or muddle up your words - just carry on."
 - "You look fine!"
 - serious mistakes can be cut out.

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- Pace Yourself (and Everyone Else)
 - When preparing the set, use stand-ins to take their place while you set up the shots.
 - Un-camera-friendly clothing
 - fine patterns which produce the moire effect
 - Dark glasses or caps which obscure/shade the eyes are not good.

Interview Questions

- Most interviews seek to achieve one or more of the following goals:
 1. Obtain the interviewee's knowledge about the topic
 2. Obtain the interviewee's opinion and/or feelings about the topic
 3. Feature the interviewee as the subject
- It's important that you know exactly why you are conducting an interview and which goal(s) you are aiming for.
- Stay focused on questions and techniques which will achieve them.

Do your homework.

- You will be expected to have a basic knowledge of your subject.
- Do not roll up to an interview with a band and ask them how many albums they have released — you should know this already.
- If you show your ignorance, you lose credibility and risk being ridiculed. At the very least, the subject is less likely to open up to you.

Have a list of questions.

- It seems obvious but some people don't think of it.
- While you should be prepared to improvise and adapt, it makes sense to have a firm list of questions which need to be asked.

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- Of course many interviewees will ask for a list of questions before hand, or you might decide to provide one to help them prepare.
 - Whether or not this is a good idea depends on the situation.
 - For example, if you will be asking technical questions which might need a researched answer, then it helps to give the subject some warning.
 - On the other hand, if you are looking for spontaneous answers then it's best to wait until the interview.

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- Try to avoid being pinned down to a preset list of questions as this could inhibit the interview.
 - However, if you do agree to such a list before the interview, stick to it.
 - Ask the subject if there are any particular questions they would like you to ask.

Back cuts

- Back-cut questions may be shot at the end of a video interview.
- Make sure you ask the back-cut questions with the same wording as the interview — even varying the wording slightly can sometimes make the edit unworkable.
- You might want to make notes of any unscripted questions as the interview progresses, so you remember to include them in the back-cuts.

Listen.

- A common mistake is to be thinking about the next question while the subject is answering the previous one, to the point that the interviewer misses some important information.
- This can lead to all sorts of embarrassing outcomes.

Open-Ended Questions

- An open-ended question is designed to encourage a full, meaningful answer using the subject's own knowledge and/or feelings.
- It is the opposite of a closed-ended question, which encourages a short or single-word answer.
- Open-ended questions also tend to be more objective and less leading than closed-ended questions.

"Why" and "How", or "Tell me about...".

- Often they are not technically a question, but a statement which implicitly asks for a response.

Examples

Closed-Ended Question

- Do you get on well with your boss?
- Who will you vote for this election?
- What colour shirt are you wearing?

Open-Ended Question

- Tell me about your relationship with your boss.
- What do you think about the two candidates in this election?
- That's an interesting colored shirt you're wearing.

How do you feel?

- Perhaps the most famous (or infamous) open-ended question is "How does this make you feel?" or some variation thereof.
- This has become a cliché in both journalism and therapy.
- The reason it is so widely used is that it's so effective.

How do you feel?

- In journalism, stories are all about people and how they are affected by events.
- Audiences want to experience the emotion.
- Even though modern audiences tend to cringe at this question, it's so useful that it continues to be a standard tool.

Leading Questions

- subtly prompts the respondent to answer in a particular way.
- generally undesirable as they result in false or slanted information.

- Do you get on well with your boss?
 - This question prompts the person to question their employment relationship. In a very subtle way it raises the prospect that maybe they don't get on with their boss.

- Tell me about your relationship with your boss.
 - This question does not seek any judgment and there is less implication that there might be something wrong with the relationship.

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- For example, in a court case:
 - How fast was the red car going when it smashed into the blue car?
 - This question implies that the red car was at fault, and the word "smashed" implies a high speed.
 - How fast was each car going when the accident happened?
 - This question does not assign any blame or pre-judgment.

More Interview Tips

- Dress appropriately, or at least dress with a purpose.
 - Your appearance will influence the way interviewees respond to you.
- Try to be unique, so it's not just another interview rehashing the same questions the subject has answered many times before.
 - Don't push this too far though — if you try to be cute or disarming it may backfire.

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- Don't have an attitude if you want a quality interview.
 - A confrontational approach is less likely to get good information.
 - Stay neutral.
 - Try not to ooze bias.
 - Don't appear to be persuaded by the subject's opinions.
 - Don't judge or directly criticize the subject.

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- Don't interrupt.
 - This can upset the subject's train of thought.
 - Minimize your own vocals (in video and audio interviews).
 - Ask questions clearly and succinctly, then let the person speak without any more words from you.
 - Learn to react silently as the subject talks — rather than saying things like "uh-huh, right, I see", use nods and facial expressions.

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- Don't over-direct.
 - Try not to give the subject too many instructions or be too specific about what you want them to say.
 - In most cases it's better to let them speak freely.

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- Show empathy.
 - Often you will need to cover sensitive or distressing topics.
 - Show some compassion for the subject without getting too emotional.
 - Ask for permission before asking difficult questions, e.g. "Is it okay to talk about...?"

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- It's not about you.
 - Don't talk about yourself or add your own opinion.
 - Your questions can be long enough to add information or interest about the topic, but the interviewee is who the audience wants to hear from.

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- When you finish the interview, put your notebook or recorder away and have an informal chat.
 - As well as being polite and leaving a good impression, you might be surprised at what additional information flows when the subject thinks it's all over and is more relaxed.

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- If you missed a question from the interview, you might be able to call the subject back later and get the answer.
 - You get one shot at this — call them back twice and you'll probably be out of luck.
 - Obviously the call-back will be more difficult for video interviews, but you might still be able to voiceover the answer yourself during the story.