

TOPIC: BROADCAST INTERVIEWING



Objective: Students will interview subjects for broadcast and print asking targeted questions about the topic keeping in mind audience, purpose, and the intended message.

THE INTERVIEW (Feature Story)

PREPARE:

- **Research your Topic**
- **Prepare Questions**

What information do you want? What is your focus? Choose questions accordingly. By knowing in advance what you want to achieve through the interview, you can better shape the message and more appropriately prepare for it.

Phrase Questions carefully, make them impossible to answer with simply "yes" or "no";
Example: Instead of "Do you like school?" Ask, "What do you like about school?" Children often do this, ask open-ended questions and be patient.

Avoid Leading Questions!

Example: Instead of, "Were you excited about the score?" Ask, "How did you feel when the game was over?"

- **Listen carefully**, Don't be so intent on asking your prepared questions that you forget to listen and follow-up with more if your questions were not answered.
- **Make direct eye contact** with the person being interviewed. It is easier to concentrate on what they are saying rather than concentrating on "filling space". Allow silence and let the person fill it instead of the reporter. A pause between questions will get more thoughtful answers. Direct eye contact also establishes good rapport—the subject knows you are listening and interested. Don't glance at the list of questions, camera person, or the clock--- that may signal you are finished and the subject may not finish their answer.
- **Warm-up the interviewee** - warm up enough to allow them to collect their thoughts ensures a smooth interview so the subject is not caught by surprise. A list of prepared questions can also be given in advance if time allows, so the subject is ready and relaxed, but be careful of "rehearsed" answers.

**As a journalism rule, if you are dealing with a controversial topic designed to catch a person by surprise, you will not prepare the subject. This rule applies for investigative hard news but not feature stories.*

- **On-Camera Questions** - Only ask information that is important to the story. For example ask, "how long are you living in the area," only if it is relevant to the focus of the story. Such info might also be included in the introduction of the story but do not waste tape or air-time unless is part of the focus.

Standards/Anchors:

1.5.10.B: Develop content appropriate for the topic.

1.6.11.A: Listen critically and respond to others in small and large group situations.

1.6.11.B: Demonstrate awareness of audience using appropriate volume and clarity in formal speaking presentations.

- **Control the Interview.** Your job is to stay on the message. If you do not stay focused, the reporter and editor will not use the clip you want from the interview. If an interviewee takes too long responding or rambles, simply politely interrupt or allow them to finish and re-ask the question saying, "That was great..but could we cover than in half the time?" Cutting down simplifies the editing process and results in a more natural-sounding response. Editing a sound bite down from a minute to 20 seconds alters the speakers inflection.
- **Ask Enough Questions** "Did I forget Something?" It is a good idea for the reporter to ask the subject if there is anything they would like to add or if they have missed anything important. Often, a response may be, "well as a matter of fact, I probably should tell you..."
- **Nods and Smiles:** Reporters need to be concerned with their facial expressions and gestures during an interview. Limiting this natural tendency is important in a field situation where listening shots of the reporter (reversals) are taken for editing purposes. It is permissible for reporters to smile or nod in agreement when it is a noncontroversial topic, but a reporter must remain unbiased and should not show opinions. Your expressions can influence responses.
- **Check Facts!** If a response is unclear, reporters should respond with, "something is puzzling me...," or "Could you please clarify..." Also, double check verifiable facts afterward.
- Ask for contact information in case more information is needed when writing the story.

General Interviewing do's and don'ts:

- Schedule in advance when it is a good time for both you, the subject, and videographer.
- Have prepared questions
- Be polite
- Explain the ground rules of the interview to people unfamiliar with how the media works - this means that you tell them the information they give you can and will be published. If they do not want any part of what they say published, they need to tell you it is "off the record."
- Build a relationship with the person being interviewed.
- Start with easy questions; end with difficult questions.
- Keep control of the interview; don't let the subject ramble or stray from the subject.
- On the other hand, don't let your "opinion" of what the story should be influence the interview. Always remember that the person you are talking with knows more about the subject than you do.

Off Camera:

- Prepare!
- Take notebook/pen/pencil
- Read back any written quotes for accuracy
- Ask for exact spelling of names and take follow-up contact information.
- Follow-up with a note of thanks, including a copy of the published story if in print.

Sources:

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"Media Toolkit For Youth Tip Sheet ." Media Awareness Network. N.p., n.d. Web. 6 Sep 2010. <http://www.media-awareness.ca/english/resources/special_initiatives/toolkit_resources/tipsheets/writing_news_story.cfm>

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Quick Tips: To improve on-air interviewing skills, practice, and watch professional reporters on television or the internet. Some Award winning interviewers and reporters: Charlie Rose, PBS; Leslie Stahl 60 Minutes and CBS News; Mike Wallace CBS News;

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