

Interview tips for journalists

- 1: Never give an interviewee questions in advance. It's OK to give a general idea about the interview themes, but being too specific may limit what you can ask in the interview. It also risks being overtaken by events and allows the interviewee to rehearse answers.
- 2: Be on time. There's nothing worse than keeping someone.
- 3: Always check that your equipment is working and that you have enough batteries, tapes, discs etc before you leave the office.
- 4: Treat the interviewee with respect. A warm but not over-enthusiastic greeting is a good start. The interviewee deserves respect whether they are a president or a man or woman in the street.
- 5: Take control of the location. It's your interview. You need to choose a place that isn't too noisy and where there are not too many distractions.
- 6: You are not the centre of attention. You are there to get the perspective of the interviewee, not give your own.
- 7: Do the research you need to, but don't try to cram it all into your questions. Put yourself in the shoes of a member of your audience before you start the interview. If they were here, what would they ask?
- 8: Ask the most important question first. The more pressed the interviewee is, the less time they will have and the more likely that they will cut the interview short.
- 9: The interview is a conversation. It is not a confrontation. You are not there to make the interviewee look stupid.
- 10: Try to avoid looking at notes. If you look at your notes, the interviewee may be distracted. And it's difficult for you to read and listen at the same time.
- 11: Maintain eye contact at all times. Keep your body language in check. If you nod your head, your subject may take this to mean that you agree with them and so there is no need to explain further. You may miss the chance to discover more. If you shake your head, or recoil with a shocked facial expression, you risk making your subject clam up. You will have shown them that you find their views offensive and so they are likely to stop short of saying even more in the same vein.
- 12: Try to ask a maximum of three or four questions. An interview is not a fishing expedition. If you can't get to the essence of what you want the interviewee to say in three or four questions, change the questions.
- 13: There are only six basic questions. Who? What? Where? When? How? Why?
- 14: Shorter questions are better than longer ones. Never ask more than one question at a time, combining questions makes it easy for the interviewee to avoid answering one altogether but without seeming to. Be as direct as you can without being rude.
- 15: Be sure of your facts. There's nothing worse than being told you are wrong by an interviewee – especially when it's live.
- 16: Listen. The interviewee might want to use your interview to say something important that you were not



expecting.

17: If the interviewee's not happy with the way they answered a particular question, don't give in to appeals for them to do it again – unless there is a factual error in the answer or there is a risk of serious confusion.

18: At the end of the interview, no matter how difficult the interviewee has been, always say thank you

19: Always check the interview has been recorded before the interviewee leaves. It's much harder to re-do the interview if there's been a technical fault.

20: When you're editing, don't take answers out of context. That's dishonest.

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- <http://www.mediahelpingmedia.org/training-resources/journalism-basics/475-20-interviewing-tips-for-journalists>