

The basics of conducting an interview

Overview:

This document covers the basics and technicalities of conducting an interview, which includes the ideal behaviour as well as making the most out of non-professional equipment. Topics will be tackled by paragraph.

Technicalities

Framing

Framing is important; having a good balance in your image draws the audience's attention to it and gives your video work a more professional look.

Whichever interview framing you go for, you will have to rely on the gridlines to frame your picture accordingly.

To enable gridlines(3x3), you can find them in your camera settings. Additionally, always remember to keep your camera resolution at a MINIMUM of 1080p (1920x1080) and the size of 16:9.

There are 2 ways of framing your picture in an interview:

1. The traditional interview



When framing your picture, your interviewee will be on either the further left or further right side of your picture. This style doesn't include the interviewer; they'll be standing beside the camera and out of the frame. With the gridlines enabled, you'll take note that the interviewee is placed on either side of the gridlines, their necks on the lower intersecting point and their eyes on the upper intersecting point of the gridlines. This framing includes a bit of space between the head and the frame, and cuts just around the chest. Your interviewee isn't looking into the camera, but just beside it, where the interviewer is asking questions.

2. The two-shot interview



The framing of this interview includes the interviewee and the interviewer, both of them looking at each other. This framing style is less traditional and less formal, but gives an overall “comfortable and inclusive feel” to it, especially if the intention is to show how well the interviewee is getting along with the interviewer.

However, since there are two people in the frame, it might feel crowded. Therefore, if you plan on shooting in this interview, make sure your frame includes that little space above the head all the way down to the waist. Keep both people on the gridline; the eyes don’t have to be on the intersecting points, but it would be good enough to have the area around it (nose, cheeks).

Sound

One of the most recurring issues in filmmaking is sound. As we will be relying on less-professional equipment as well as an environment that is less controllable, there are important points to go through:

Recording on a separate audio recording device

In an interview, the sound is always recorded separately from the video. As such, you will need to use an audio recording device to ask your interviewee your questions. Your smartphones will work just fine; the phone’s microphone has significantly improved a lot over the years and make them the perfect substitute for professional audio recording. All you need is an application to record your audio, which should already be on your phone.

There are a few points that are important to note:

Proximity: the closer the microphone is to the interviewer, the better. If the mic is too far away, it will pick up on other sounds and drown the interviewee’s voice. Ideally, 5-10 cm between the mic and the mouth should do. But be careful of harsh plosives: with the mic being too close, it can pick up on the letter sounds accompanied by strong gusts of air (the “p” and “b”). Try recording yourself pronouncing these letters into your mic, and you will hear how unpleasant those sounds are.

Outdoors vs indoors: when outdoors, the sound will pick up on a lot of noise. If possible, bring your interviewee to a quieter place, away from traffic, construction work, big crowds, anything that may cause a lot of noise for the mic to pick up. Being indoors is usually quieter, which makes it more ideal for the sound recording, but you need to make sure that the reason for being indoors connects to the story you’re trying to tell (e.g. interviewee is a teacher conducting class with refugee kids, which makes more sense as to why she is being

recorded indoors. If activity was outside and you're interviewing the teacher indoors, there's an immediate disconnect within the story, despite how much more convenient it would be to record indoors than outdoors). Also, make sure that the room in which you conduct your interview is not too spacious; too much echo will severely affect your audio recording.

What if I want my image to include some activity in the background that results in a lot of noise?

If that's the case, then you want to make sure that the mic is directed at the interviewee and that it stays as close to the him/her as possible, within 5-10cm. If your mic points at the activity in the background instead of the interviewee, it'll pick up on that noise.

Lighting

When used appropriately, lighting can help your interviewee to stand out from the background. As a result, camera people need to consider the lighting that surrounds them.

Outdoors

If interviewing outdoors, your ideal weather would be cloudy. Too much sunshine would cause too much glare in the picture (eyes squinting doesn't look great) and night time would be too dark to conduct an interview. If there's too much sunshine, find some shade and conduct your interview there. If it's too dark outside, move indoors.

Indoors

Having the interview indoors can be trickier, as you will be dealing with more different types of artificial light than the uniform natural light. Ideally, you want the face of your interviewee to be well-lit, which can be done in 2 ways:

Rely on outdoor lighting: by placing your interviewee opposite you and in front of the window, your interviewee will be perfectly lit.

Rely on indoor lamps: If you choose to interview in a small room with no window (or at nighttime), turn on all the lamps in the room. Then, use one of the smaller lamps and aim the light at the interviewee's face, preferably on the side which has more space between the frame and the face (see picture).



Prepping the interview

Interviewer and interviewee

The most successful interviews are the result of little steps taken to ensure that the interviewee feels comfortable, especially when being surrounded by equipment and being recorded. Here are some healthy tips:

Chatting with your interviewee: the more comfortable the interviewee is with you, the easier it will be to interview them. Therefore, if you can, try to spend some time talking to them before doing your interview. Invite them for coffee, for dinner or lunch to set the mood. They will be more at ease knowing who they're being interviewed by.

Have your questions written down: It's important that you have your questions at your ready, especially when you need to ask them. It also helps you keep track of the questions that may have been answered while answering another question, so you don't have to ask a question that has already been answered. If you feel like they haven't really answered, ask them to elaborate. If you think they have given too much information, ask them to repeat their answer (that usually prompts them to shorten their answer, making them more concise).

"This interview is about you": before starting the interview, let your interviewee know that you want the interview to represent their views as much as possible. As such, if there is a moment where they want to take back what they said, like "cut that last part out" or "that is off the record", then do so and inform your camera person with a simple "cut it".

"3-second rule": The 3-second pause between questions and answers is crucial in film editing. When the camera and sound are ready, wait 3 seconds before you start your interview. This same rule applies to before and after your interviewee answers your questions, so make sure to INFORM YOUR INTERVIEWEE that he/she needs to wait 3 seconds after every question asked.

Warm up your interviewee: You have your questions to ask, but hold them off by asking them "dummy questions": they range from "how are you?" to questions relating to your topic, such as "when was the last time you were at the UN" or "Have you been to the UN in New York? I hear they have amazing programs going on there!" These questions are meant to make the interviewee not only comfortable, but also engaged in the questions they're being asked.

Interviewer and camera person:

The film crew will be composed of minimum 2 people: the interviewer and the camera person.

Camera person: their job is to film from beginning to end, despite what is being said. Once he/she starts filming, even if the interviewee mispronounces something, keep filming until the last question has been answered AND UNTIL THE INTERVIEWER SAYS, "**CUT**". The most common mistake is that camera people stop filming when they think it's over, often times resulting in the last bit of the interview being cut out. Since the interview is helmed by the

interviewer, that makes him/her the boss, which means the camera person HAS TO WAIT for the interviewer to give the camera person a sign to stop filming.

Being in sync: interviewer and camera person work as a team. The last thing you want is to have missing audio to your footage, or the other way around. When ready, the interviewer will press on their audio recording app and say, “recording”. He/She looks to the camera person, saying “camera?” which means “is camera ready to record”. On cue, the camera person starts filming by saying, “filming” or “recording”, which lets the interviewer know that the interview can begin.

B-roll: This term is used to describe the extra footage that isn’t part of the interview. It can be a footage of a building, of a park or people in public spaces (as long as you only film the back of their head, so we audience don’t recognize them). It can also be inside a house, showcasing diplomas to give your interviewee more background, etc. This can be used for editing and give the story more depth, so make sure your camera-person get some b-roll before and after the interview.

The Release Forms

It is absolutely CRUCIAL that you ask the interviewee to sign the release forms (attached) BEFORE YOU CONDUCT YOUR INTERVIEW. If they don’t agree to sign, then you can’t interview them. Release forms act as written proof that they have agreed to your interview, giving you the right to use the footage as you please and to distribute the video containing their interviews. Without these forms, your interviewee could change their mind and demand that you remove their segment from the final video.

That’s a Wrap!

After your interview, make sure you have your footage and audio recording on two separate hard drives (between on cloud, on the computer or external harddrive). Scan all your documents and store them into a binder/folder, including the questions and the release forms, so they can be handed off to the project leader.

Final last points:

- ALWAYS make sure that your equipment is **fully charged**. If your phone runs quickly out of batteries, I recommend you bring along a portable charger (a power bank to plug your phone into).
- ALWAYS make sure that your phone has enough **disk space** for filming. Video footage eats up disk space very quickly, so you need to free up as much space as you can before conducting your interview.

Happy filming!