

Interview Questions

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.

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

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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Think ahead about the type of questions you want to ask your interviewee. What kind of information are you looking for from this particular person and what are the type of questions that will best get them to give you the information you're looking for? You will need some FACT and some EMOTION questions. No need to go crazy. 5-10 questions is usually enough.

Of course, many newsmakers will ask for a list of questions before hand. **Don't give out specific questions in advance.** I cannot stress this point strongly enough. It's perfectly acceptable to give someone a general idea of what the interview will be about, but do not give them your list of questions. If you do, they will try to memorize their answers in advance and you will lose spontaneity and freshness. Your interview will end up feeling stale, unauthentic and rehearsed.

Ask the subject if there are any particular questions they would like you to ask.

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

Avoid "yes" or "no" answers

Your questions should be asked in such a way that you won't get "yes" or "no" answers. You need your documentary interviewees to give you substantive answers that you can use in your video edits. Instead of "Are you happy with the outcome of the court case?" Ask, "What is your response to the outcome of today's court case?"

The ability to ask *open-ended questions* is very important in many vocations, including education, counselling, mediation, sales, investigative work and journalism.

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 (see next page).

Open-ended questions typically begin with words such as "Why" and "How", or phrases such as "Tell me about...". Often they are not technically a question, but a statement which implicitly asks for a response.

Examples

Closed-Ended Question	Open-Ended Question
Do you get on well with your boss?	Tell me about your relationship with your boss.
Who will you vote for this election?	What do you think about the two candidates in this election?
What color shirt are you wearing?	That's an interesting colored shirt you're wearing.

Prepare, but be spontaneous

Even though you have prepared questions in advance, allow yourself to veer off from questions if the interviewee says something interesting or unexpected that you'd like to explore further. Sometimes the unplanned "spontaneous" questions & answers create the best moments.

Emotion Questions

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.

The best part about a TV news story vs a book or article is that you can "see", "hear", "feel" what's happening on screen. You are not completely utilizing video if you are just relaying FACTS. Video is about sharing an emotional ride with your audience. So when you're interviewing your subjects, make sure to include questions that get to the emotion. "How do you feel about..." "What's in your heart about this issue..."

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.

In psychology, feelings and emotions are central to human behavior. Therapists are naturally keen to ask questions about feelings.

Have Energy!

If you are bored and reserved, your newsmaker will imitate you and you will end up with a boring interview. So create energy within yourself when asking the questions and your energy will rub off and help create a more dynamic interview.

Keep your mouth shut

Stay quiet when the newsmaker is talking. You don't want to hear yourself in the background. (Watch out for the "hmmm", "Oh right..") Just ask the question and then keep quiet. It's good to nod, and make gentle facial expressions, just no sound. Unless of course, YOU are part of the story and the camera has both of you in the shot.

Ask for final comment

Here's a great video interviewing tip: at the end of the interview, always ask the person if they have any final thoughts. Ask them if there was anything you missed. This can sometimes bring out some great information you hadn't thought to ask about.

Do not stop taping when the interview is "over"

Especially when you have someone who is nervous and never got quite comfortable with the interview. When you're done with your official questions, say "OK, that's the end of the interview." Make sure the camera continues to roll at this point because often the conversation will continue. Psychologically, the person no longer feels the "pressure" of the interview and will loosen up. This is the time I have often gotten the best quotes of the interview!