

Interviewing for Television Tipsheet

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Person on the street:

- Make it colorful and diverse. Talk to old people, young people, women, men, etc...
- Ask the same question in exactly the same way.
- Ask a simple question. "What are you doing here today?" "What do you think of the latest legislation passed?" "Are you for or against this law and why?" "What are your thoughts about this?"
- Don't phrase your question in a way that invites a "yes" or "no" answer.
- For editing purposes, change your location behind the camera for each interview. For example, first you are to the right of the camera, next to the left of the camera, and so forth. Keep this process up every time to avoid jump cuts.

Sit-down interviews.

- Do not talk to your character about the main topic BEFORE the camera starts rolling. This ruins the fresh momentum of the interview, or the character ends up saying things later like "as I told you before..."
- Always start the interview with a sound check. Ask your character to state his or her name and title and have them spell it out for you on camera.
- Start with soft, easy, general questions. Make your character comfortable.
- Sit close to the lens of the camera, either to the right or immediate left.
- Make sure the mic isn't in your frame.
- Do not interrupt the interview with reaffirming comments to make the interviewee feel more comfortable. For example, don't say "uh-huh, yes, I understand" etc... you ruin your sound. Just NOD in agreement. Same affect.
- If they ramble or talk too long, do not be afraid to ask the question again and say can you "briefly" summarize that for me.
- If you miss something, say, "I'm sorry, I didn't understand that. Can you explain it to me again?"
- Ask: "So, what's the bottom line?" "What's your main goal?"
- Don't be afraid of awkward silence or emotional, teary interviews. Look concerned, sympathetic, but do not stop the taping. That can be your best on-camera moment.
- The less you talk, the more they will talk.
- Don't be afraid to ask the tough questions and play devil's advocate. Say: "Some people we spoke to about this have said such and such about you. How do you respond to these allegations?"
- Listen well. Think sound bites.
- Take notes. Write down the quotes... Take the time code.
- Put a star or two stars near the sound bites that you think are powerful and useful.
- In closing, ask them if there are any concerns or anything more they want to add or say.
- Make sure you have set-up and cutaway shots.
- Never fake your setting. Do not rearrange the furniture and put a "flag" or "picture" behind your interviewee so that it appears in the shot. Many do this, but it's unethical and theatrical.
- Do not make any promises you cannot or do not want to keep. If they ask for a tape of the interview, say you cannot provide it, but that you can let them know when the piece will be aired so that they can record it at home. Just Be Honest!