

HOW TO MASTER THE ART OF THE INTERVIEW



BREAKING DOWN THE BASICS

An often under-utilized tool in the content creator's tool-bag is the interview. A good interview shouldn't be very difficult to produce, and should be engaging and informative. It's an easy tool to get industry leaders on your site and build your reputation as an industry leader. The only catch is that they have to be done right. We've all seen bad interviews, the interviewer doesn't know what he's doing, the guest isn't actually answering any of the questions, or the whole thing is so poorly produced it's pain inducing to watch. Here are some of the quickest, and simplest tips and tricks to clean up your

STEP 1: KEEP IT SIMPLE

Keeping your questions simple is the most important part of interviewing. We'll get into what to avoid in your questions later on, but you can solve nearly all your issues by simply focusing on a single question and stating it concisely.

STEP 2: BE ON POINT

Stick to your topic. There's no need to wander off topic; if you do you'll derail your interview and the audience will lose focus.

STEP 3: LISTEN

Some of the best questions aren't the ones you planned on asking. Listen to the answers you're given and don't be afraid to ask follow up questions; if you're thinking it, your audience probably is too.

STEP 4: DO RESEARCH

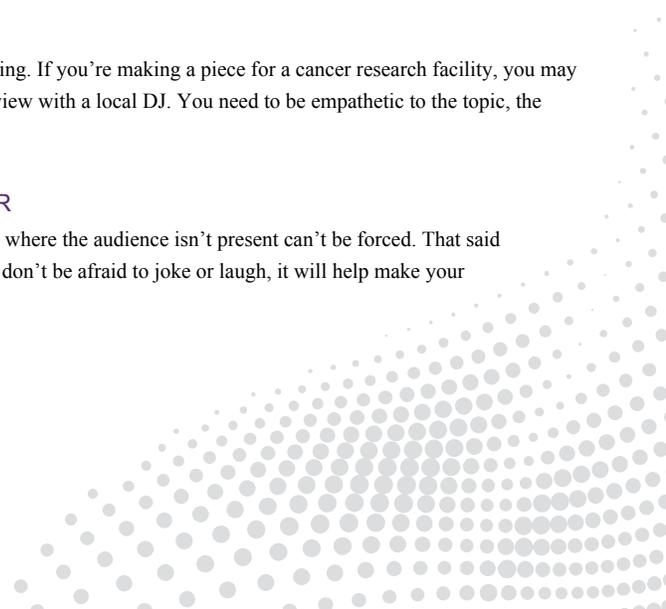
The easiest way to make your interview seem amateurish is to not know what you're talking about, or whom you're talking to. By researching not only the subject but also the interviewee you can create better questions, touch on more personal topics, and make sure you answer the latest questions that your audience has.

STEP 5: EMPATHY

Be aware of the style of interview you are conducting. If you're making a piece for a cancer research facility, you may not want to use the same tone you would for interview with a local DJ. You need to be empathetic to the topic, the interviewee, and the audience.

STEP 6: HAVE A SENSE OF HUMOR

This is tough, because comedy, especially comedy where the audience isn't present can't be forced. That said if the situation arises, and you feel it's appropriate don't be afraid to joke or laugh, it will help make your interview feel relaxed and fun.



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STEP 7: LET THE INTERVIEW BREATHE

The fastest way to overwhelm your audience or the interviewee is to ask too many questions. Silence can be your best friend. If you see the interviewee is getting emotional, or you feel a little silence would add effect to their answer, don't be afraid to do that. Just let the interview breathe.

STEP 8: ENTHUSIASM

Finally, be enthusiastic. If you want your audience to be captured and enjoy the content then make sure you enjoy producing the content. An enthusiastic interviewer makes it easier on the interviewee and makes the final product more enjoyable.

LOOKING OUT FOR LANDMINES

While all of these tips are going to improve your interviews, the best technique you can use is to simply ask good questions. While there is no easy answer to how to formulate a good question, there are techniques to avoiding bad questions. Here's a list of things to avoid:

1) NO QUESTION

You should never ask a question without actually asking a question. This happens when you say "Talk about..." by doing this you let the interviewee wander in their answer and they may either get off track, or simply never talk about what you wanted to cover. Instead make sure your questions ask one of "Who, What, Where, Why, When, or How"

2) DOUBLE-BARRELED QUESTIONS

Asking double-barreled questions (questions that cover two topics at once) causes problems because it gives the interviewee an out. They can choose to answer just one of the questions and avoid a topic they may not want to discuss, but that you feel needs to be addressed.

3) OVERLOADING

Overloading a question is one of the first signs that an interviewer isn't professional. They are adding superfluous details, or sentences that don't need to be there. When they do that they bog down the actual question and often times confuse the interviewee, or the audience. These situations typically end up with the interviewee asking you what exactly you just asked him; a situation that doesn't paint you in a very good light.

4) REMARKS

Like overloading, remarks are a sure fire way to show that your interviews aren't professional. They happen when you add opinion into your question such as "You have always been the best..." Unless that information is pertinent to your question it's not necessary, and in some cases the interviewee will ignore the question all together because they are busy playing down the remark.



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5) TRIGGER WORDS

Trigger words are different for each interview and it may be difficult to know which words to avoid, words that might incite anger or aggression in the interviewee that could harm the interview. The best way to avoid them is to do your research. Make note of any events that happened around the subject you are discussing, or to the interviewee, that could trigger a negative reaction. Avoid alluding to these items as well as using words that could suggest the person was at fault.

6) HYPERBOLE

When you use hyperbole to compliment, or overstate something, the interviewee did they will ignore the question and instead focus on downplaying the hyperbole. Hence, avoid hyperbole altogether and focus on the question.

7) CLOSED QUESTION

One of the worst things you can do in an interview is ask a closed question, otherwise known as a yes-no question. If your interviewee doesn't need more than one word to answer your question it either shouldn't be asked, or you need to find another way to phrase it.

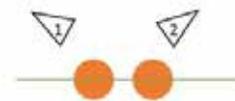
FILMING YOUR INTERVIEW

If you're going to film your interviews there are a couple of different techniques you can use.

THE SIT-DOWN INTERVIEW

The most formal technique is the sit-down interview. It's typically shot against a staged background with professional lighting and while it takes the most time to set up, it does look the best. These interviews are typically much longer in length than the other two formats, generally exceeding five minutes.

In this technique you can have one or more cameras but typically the interviewer and the interviewee sit down facing each other and the cameras are shot over the shoulder and single shots. This technique works best with two cameras but if you do only have one camera there are tricks to make it work. One thing to keep in mind, whether you have two cameras or not, is to make sure you don't cross the axis. That happens when you shoot two people from opposite angles and when you're watching it back and it's edited together it makes it look like both the interviewer and the interviewee are looking in the same direction. In order to avoid this you need to draw an imaginary axis across your scene and make sure your cameras are on the same side of it. It should look like this:



The triangles are your cameras, the circles are your subjects, and the green line is the axis.

If your shoot only has one camera you want to eliminate the camera that shoots the interviewer and only capture footage of the interviewee. Then after the interview is complete reshoot your interviewer, sitting in the same spot, re-asking the same questions, but filmed from the second camera spot.



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THE SIDE-BY-SIDE INTERVIEW

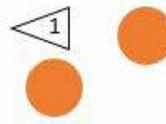
The side-by-side interview is for when you don't have the time, or the option to set up a sit-down interview, and it's generally shorter in length, being no more than 3 minutes or so. In this technique the interviewer stands beside the interviewee at the beginning of the interview while the camera films a two-shot (both the interviewer and the interviewee are in frame, generally it's a medium-close up). Then the interviewer will ask his first question and roughly 10 seconds into the answer he will take a step back. During those first ten seconds the camera will push into a medium-close up (roughly from your high chest to the top of the head). After those ten seconds (approximately) have elapsed the interviewer is going to turn himself so that his back is facing the camera and take a half step backwards, this is so that the camera will pick up both the interviewee's eyes in the shot, instead of getting a profile shot. In this style of interview as well as the sit-down interview you want the interviewee to be looking at the interviewer, and not at the camera. Once the interview is drawing to a close the interviewer will return to his starting position while asking his final question. After he has asked it, the camera will zoom out back into the two-shot they started on for the rest of the interview. Your set up should look like this:



Example (in this example the interviewer does not make the body turn and the camera comes out of the two shot too early, but you get the point)

THE STREETER INTERVIEW

The final interview style is called the streeter interview and like the name would suggest this is where you go out on the street and ask people questions. In this style of interview typically the interviewer is not mic'd up (but does hold the microphone) and the interviewee is looking into the camera. These interviews are generally edited together with voiceovers and an on camera appearance from the interviewer at the end of the piece. Most of the time in this style of interview you're after just quick 30 second answers and filming is fairly simple; you can operate the camera and act as the interviewee. If you do have both a cameraman and an interviewer then the interviewer should position himself behind the camera (but not in frame) and it should look something like this:



GET ASKING

With a well-filmed, well-edited, and well-researched interview you can create some of the most knowledgeable, engaging, and entertaining content out while also establishing yourself as a market leader. Creating content is vital. Creating smart content is even more important. Interviews are the easiest way to get there.