

TAKE FIVE

5 quick production tips

by Jennifer O'Rourke



Interviewing Tips

Whether you're interviewing your family for grandma and grandpa's 50th anniversary, the CEO of a business for a training video, or even a politician for a news story; there are a few tried and true tips used by the pros that can help you put together a clean and polished interview.

You can't get a good interview by holding the camera at eye level with one hand, thrusting a mic into someone's face with the other hand, and asking questions behind the back of the camera. Theoretically, it *can* be done, but it *shouldn't* be done... unless you're just causally cruising around the company picnic. Two musts: Use an external mic – don't rely on the camera's mic because you can't get it close enough to the subject without compromising quality; and use a tripod – or some other way to keep your camera steady, even if it's just propped up on a table. Here are a few more tips to help you get clean editable and polished interviews.

1. Sit Close to the Camera

Unless this is a first person account, the best angle for an interview subject is a $\frac{3}{4}$ -view of their face. Never a profile shot, and you don't want them staring into the camera (only politicians and news anchors stare into the camera)! This is the most comfortable of all interview situations for the interviewee and the viewer. To achieve this, you set the camera pointing at your subject, then sit right next to the camera, so that your subject appears to be looking at you, not your camera.

2. Set the Camera at Eye Level

Set the camera at the same level as your subject. Imagine a tic-tac-toe grid in front of your lens and set the subject's eyes in either the left or right side upper point where the lines intersect, and then give them what we call "lead room".

If you're interviewing a basketball player who is twice your height, you

should stand on a chair, or have him sit in the chair. The goal is to have your subject in a neutral position, not *upstanding* with the camera looking down on the subject, giving the feeling that the interviewer has some power over the subject; or *downcast* giving the feeling that the interviewer is inferior to the subject.

3. Don't Stare into the Viewfinder

If you stare into the camera's viewfinder or eyepiece, your interviewee has a strange visual to look at; a one-eyed half-face blocked by a large black plate of plastic – and that lone eye is looking at the screen, rather than the subject. We engage people by using eye contact, so use a tripod, and frame your subject in a medium shot, and just glance at the viewfinder occasionally to assure the subject didn't shift.

4. Uh-huh – yeah – OK

I watch a show with a host who constantly interrupts people to make unrelated comments, which breaks their chain of thought. Being silent and non-committal, however, appears as if you are bored and unengaged. There's a fine line between encouraging the continued conversation and annoying interruptions by the interviewer. Not only are the usual "uh-huhs" annoying audible responses, they are very difficult to remove in editing.

Practice listening to someone talking to you without making any audible response, but letting them know you're engaged by slightly nodding your head with slight facial movements; a simple smile or frown when appropriate, this is how the pros do it.

5. Don't Step on Them!

During the interview, if you feel your subject is going on a tangent you know you won't need, feel free to interrupt him, but if the statement he is making will end up in the edited video, then let him finish the comment. Completely. I've had to do some tight sound tweaking to edit out the words of an interviewer who jumped in with the next question before a statement was finished. This is very common in conversations, and we hardly notice it, but it's difficult to edit out, and you'll always have to compromise where the cut happens – either by cutting out a portion of the final statement, or leaving in an audible blip of the interviewer. Listen to the sounds of the interviewee; you can tell when they're winding down. Be prepared to jump in, but give a heartbeat pause between his last word and your next one. Your editor (or you!) will thank you later.

Using a few of these tactics will make your subjects feel more at ease. Let them know what's happening. When you first sit them down, make small talk about their day while you are setting up your gear. You can hit "record" any time during the setup, but don't make a big deal about it. Just merge from small banter into the interview and when it's over they'll say, "was that it?" yeah – simple as that. 

Jennifer O'Rourke has produced thousands of interviews for network and local TV stations nationwide.



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