

The Art of Interviewing

1. Choose your Interviewer: Who is going to interview the guest? Interviews are done with the brain – you need a good thinker, not a pretty person or a mellifluous voice as the interviewer. And the interviewer must have a genuine interest in other people.
2. Choose your interviewee: Sometimes the guest can't string three words together. The only way to tell is by talking to them prior to the interview, preferably before you commit to the interview. Part of the art of interviewing is being able to find good "talent".
3. Choose your subject: Know the topic and angle of their involvement in whatever you are going to dwell on. An interview is not just WITH someone, it's ABOUT something. Don't just decide to interview Professor X – know exactly what you're going to interview the good Prof about.
4. The usual is dull: The UNUSUAL is of interest to the listener. Look for it and highlight it.
5. Do your homework: Know as much about your guest as possible. If you're reviewing an album – listen to it; if a book – read it.
6. Seek the expected AND the unexpected: Michael Parkinson's rule was: never ask a question to which you don't know the answer. But that has limitations. Sometimes it's better to dangle a bait and invite an interviewee to respond to question they've never considered or never been asked before. I once won \$10 from designer Hardy Amies who bet me I couldn't ask him a question he'd never been asked before (he'd been interviewed hundreds of times). I won the bet. That sort of creativity is an important part of the art of the interview.
7. Prepare your link: Before you begin your interview – prepare your link or introduction. This is the big forward sell. Have creative hooks or introductions. Be a good seller of what is coming up. Start with the most important single fact, then fill in what needs to be known, then introduce the person. Be clear!!
8. Always get TITLE and PRONUNCIATION right the first time: check both before you start the interview. Go over it in your head and out loud till you've got it down pat. It's about maintaining (or saving) yours and the station's credibility.
9. Don't write a list of questions: Have an outline of the shape of the interview (the general direction in which you expect it to go) and then play it by ear or feel. Always listen to your guest and fire questions following logically on one from another.
10. Do write your FIRST question: Know where you are going to begin.
11. Do write your LAST question: Know where you're going to.
12. Do plan a structure of the interview. Know where you want to head to. Know the key points or areas that need to be covered.
13. Sound interested – sound as if you're glad to be here with your guest. Make it sound as if you are interested and excited about your guest and the topic at hand.

14. Ask short questions: Short and sharp every time, and keep it simple. Ten word questions are good – six word questions are even better. Long, wordy questions are ALWAYS bad questions.
15. Avoid statements: Ask questions every time. Make sure you only ask questions.
16. Ask questions: Don't answer for the guest. Let them speak.
17. Never ask double barreled questions – invariably the guest will only answer half of your double question.
18. Listen to your guest: Keep listening at all times. Don't keep interrupting.
19. Your next best question will come out of the current answer. Know when you've been answered – avoid trying to get the answer you want by re phrasing it over and over again. Know when you just aren't going to get the answer your after.
20. Ask follow up questions: There needs to be a train of logic – a reason why one bit follows on from another. Don't suddenly dart off in a direction that has no link to what has just been said.
21. Listen like a listener. Ask yourself, is this interesting to the listeners of your program? What are the listeners asking themselves as they listen to this? Ask their questions for them.
22. Scratch where people are itching: Know what is or may be bothering people who are listening to your interview and go there. You are their only voice.
23. Plan a surprise question now and then: Surprise your guest by asking a curly one. They create special moments.
24. Avoid Jargon: Don't assume the listener knows your terminology. If the interviewee uses it, ask them to clarify what they meant.
25. Avoid the abstract: Stick to the concrete, no wild tangents.
26. Keep it simple – Don't lose your listeners. No need to demonstrate your intelligence or how much homework you've done. The interview is not about how clever you are – but about what the interviewee has to say.
27. Seek anecdotes: If they have a story to tell, let them tell it. Don't cut them off.
28. Plan your finish: Know how you want to wrap it up.
29. Point to how the listener can find out more or get the book or go to the Company or artist's web site or get their CD etc.

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