

THE SYN INTERVIEW GUIDE

How to be a first-class interviewer



WHY DO WE HAVE INTERVIEWS ON SYN RADIO AND TV?

Interviews bring extra dimensions to your program. They might be done for one of the following reasons:

- To allow a guest to express their opinion or explain a situation.
- To interpret, analyse or place an event in context.
- To entertain or provide insight to the guest's personality or their work.
- To provide the audience with a personal, first-hand account of an issue or story.

In short, we do interviews on SYN to provide a more informative, more entertaining service to our community.

General qualities of a good interviewer:

- Confidence and self awareness;
- Curiosity;
- Good general knowledge of the subject matter; and
- Not being afraid to ask a 'dumb' question.

The role of an interviewer is to:

- Direct the conversation;
- Consistently probe, encourage, query, challenge, and generally draw out the person being interviewed; and
- Connect the audience with the guest.

INTERVIEWS ON SYN

A really big part of SYN's overall content is interviews. We have great relationships with promoters, record labels, festivals and independent artists, and our Talks Manager and Music Director work very hard to keep those relationships positive.

Why do guests want to get interviews on SYN?

Because SYN has a unique, young and large audience that is open to a huge variety of music and culture. We don't tell guests what to say or do during the interview, so it's a stress-free, fun way for guests to get their name out there.

What does SYN get out of it?

We get interesting content that makes our programming more interesting, and we get credibility as a source of information on stuff of interest to our audiences.

But we need to be careful: Record labels and artists are usually promoting a commercial product when they do an interview. SYN cannot legally promote the commercial aspects of bands unless they are a formal sponsor of the organisation, i.e. we can't tell our audience where and how to buy their music, how to buy tickets to their show, etc.

INTERVIEWS ARE NOT COMMERCIAL PROMOTIONS: SYN USES INTERVIEWS AND GUESTS TO ENHANCE OUR PROGRAMS AND INFORM/ ENTERTAIN OUR COMMUNITY. WE ARE UNDER NO OBLIGATION TO PROMOTE A GUEST OR THEIR PRODUCT AT ANY TIME – IT IS ILLEGAL FOR US TO DO THAT WITHOUT A FORMAL SPONSORSHIP ARRANGEMENT!

GETTING AN INTERVIEW

SYN interviews are coordinated by the Talks Manager. This job exists for two reasons:

- **To avoid doubling up** – the Talks Manager knows all the interviews on SYN, therefore we never repeat ourselves.
- **To be professional** – the Talks Manager alone approaches potential guests, so we don't have various people annoying publicists/ managers, making SYN look unprofessional and disorganised.

There are three ways you might find yourself conducting an interview at SYN:

1. The Talks Department has contacted you or your producer and informed you of this great interview opportunity. You have said "yes!" excitedly.
2. SYN has been blessed with an interview opportunity from a publicist and you have excitedly answered the Talks Managers call-out to conduct the interview.
3. You have identified a suitable guest for your show and the Talks Manager has set it up for you or given you the green light to go ahead and organise it yourself.

If you want to have your mate's band on, or if a band approaches you for an interview, that's okay, but the Talks Manager needs to be kept in the loop on all interviews.

The Talks Manager is supported by the Talks Department made up of a Local Talks Manager and Arts/Entertainment Talks Manager. They are each contactable at:

Talks Manager - talks@syn.org.au

Local Talks Manager – local.talks@syn.org.au

Arts/Entertainment Talks Manager – talks.assistant@syn.org.au

1700 Talks Manager - talks.tv@syn.org.au

All interviews must be arranged by the Talks Department for these very good reasons. Record labels and publicists get very pissed off when they are contacted by presenters who are not part of the Talks Department.

DO NOT CONTACT PUBLICISTS, ARTISTS OR RECORD LABELS DIRECTLY. UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES. NEVER.

TYPES OF INTERVIEWS

Live in studio: Face-to-face interview with talent in studio, live to air.

Live phoner: A live to air interview over the phone.

Prerecorded in studio: Face-to-face interview with talent in studio recorded in advance, then edited to be broadcast at a later date.

Prerecorded phoner: Interview conducted over the phone and recorded in studio in advance, then edited to broadcast at a later date.

Prerecorded off-site: Vox-pops and interviews at venues, other studios, and at events such as Push Over or Big Day Out, then edited and broadcast at a later date.

PREPARATION

Okay, so you've got the interview lined up, now you need to prepare for it. What do you do?

Angle: The first thing you need to figure out is your ANGLE. Ask yourself why you are interviewing this person. You must have an angle for the interview to enable you to keep it on track and focused. More often than not your angle will be chosen for you already, whether it be for a new release, a tour or some sort of special event; that's why you have been granted the interview opportunity.

Lead-In: Once you've decided on an angle you can start writing a script for the LEAD-IN. A lead-in sets the interview in context before you begin to talk to your guest. It tells the audience WHO they are going to hear and WHY they are going to hear them (your angle!). The lead-in is your chance to intrigue your audience and keep them tuned to SYN to hear the interview. It's basically an intro to the interview.

TASK: Find an angle and write a lead-in for an interview with your favourite band:

Angle:

Lead-In:

Questions: Now, it's time to write your questions. Where do you start?

Knowing your stuff is important. You will need to thoroughly and carefully research your guest and the interview topic to ensure a high-quality interview takes place.

The first place to start is the bands press release. This is where you'll find your angle as well as any other information the band is wanting to talk about (otherwise they wouldn't have sent out the presser). Be objective with this info – they write it in a self-promoting way and so you should take some of it with a grain of salt, and make sure you check other sources for info as well.

The Talks Manager should be able to provide you with this.

Sometimes a band may not have a press release as such and you'll have to hunt down information on the band all on your lonesome. It's always good to do your own research as well - that way you can find your own perspective of the band and not Here is a list of sources you may be able to find some inspiration:

- Listen to their stuff! How can you interview the band critically if you don't even know how they sound? Go over past releases as well as their latest material, and you ask the Music Director about obtaining any of their newest releases from SYN's Music Library.
- Band website, Myspace or other music information sites – here you should be able to find a whole bunch of information about your guests as well as links to other sources of information.

- Live footage of the band – being a big international or even a kick-starting local band you may not have had the chance to catch them live before, sites like YouTube bring the live experience to the comfort of your own home so you can see how the play.
- Previous interviews and reviews – you may be able to find some questions your guest responds well to, or pitfalls to avoid.

There are also so major no-no's when it comes to asking bands questions. Here is a list of things to almost never to ask a musician (unless your research leads you to believe that they will respond well to such a question):

- Anything to do with their band name, how they started out, influences or describing their music.
- Joke questions – your guest may not respond well to this and think you are making fun of them.
- Anything you should already know from your research (such as their past release, tour dates, etc.).

Here are a few more tips about good questioning:

- Ask “open” questions that will get interesting answers. Never allow your guest to get away with a “yes” or “no” answer!
- Keep questions short and clear – 2 long-winded questions in 1 (double-barreled questions) will confuse your guest and audience.
- Make sure you ask a question, not a statement! For example, if you say, “I think your new album is really diverse and different from your last...” don't expect a good reply.

Structure: So you've got a line of sweet questions to ask, so what order do you ask them in?

It is important that you should your arrange your questions in a logical order that makes sense to your guest and your audience.

Also, it is not necessary to have questions scripted word-for-word. In fact, avoiding set scripted questions will ensure your interview flows well and avoids that clunky reading-off-a-page sound. Though it might seem tricky to create questions on the spot using only a line of inquiry as a guide, it will definitely sound better to your guest and your audience if you can shape a question that flows within the conversation.

Likewise, it is very allowable to move away from your original line of questioning if the conversation is moving in a different direction. Be flexible with your questions and structure and don't be afraid to further pursue a line of conversation which you think your guest and audience would be interested in.

Time: Once you've compiled a list of interesting questions and organised them into a sensible arrangement, estimate the time length of your interview.

If you're doing a live interview, you should aim for no longer than 3-4mins. If you want to go for longer, plan to play a track or an ID/Sweeper/Promo halfway through the interview, to break it up. This allows you to regain your composure for the 2nd half of the interview, and also keeps the audience following intently.

If you're doing a pre-recorded interview, you can talk for longer because you can edit it later. You will be given a set time to conduct the interview in, usually somewhere between 15-30mins. But you still need to make sure the interview doesn't run stale at any time. And make sure you edit it down to a solid 5-7mins.

The *SYN Interview Template* can be found as an appendix of this document. This can help organise your interview in a professional manner.

TASK: Using the *SYN Interview Template*, come up with a guest you would like to interview on SYN and prepare for an interview with them.

THE BIG DAY

Before the interview:

Get there 15mins early, just in case! Be sure to get yourself all set up so you are ready to go as soon as your guest arrives.

When you meet your guest, make them feel welcome and comfortable, and let them know how long there is until the start of the interview.

Prepare some small talk beforehand so there are no awkward silences. Some easy places to start can often be by asking them, "How is your day going?", "How much do you know about SYN?" Or if they're an international act, "How are you finding Australia so far?" This small talk will also allow you to gauge how friendly they are; how awake and ready to go they are; whether they talk a lot or are quite shy, etc. So make sure your SYN and Australian knowledge is up to scratch!

In the studio, talk them through the equipment (microphone, headphones) and explain how you will do your lead-in before you introduce them and then start the interview.

You will also need to brief them beforehand about the SYN rules regarding swearing and discrimination, they are YOUR responsibility once the On Air light goes on and you might get into trouble if anything goes wrong.

During the interview:

There are a few rules you need to keep in mind during the interview:

- Always have respect for your guest, even if you don't know much about them or don't like who they are or what they do – your job is to represent SYN through this interview, so don't let it get personal! A good form of respect is to NOT look at your questions while they're talking.
- Keep control of *your* interview. Do not let the guest dictate where you want to take the interview. You have the power to frame the interview (using your angle), and you have the power to shorten or extend the interview (within reason).
- LISTEN!!! You have a set of questions, but this does not mean you have to stick to those exact questions. A great interview flows without interruption. So listen to the

- answers your guest provides, and react accordingly.
- Ensure you remind your audiences who they're hearing or seeing on SYN. Regularly identify your guest to allow for random tune-ins halfway through your interview.
 - Have fun and keep the guest happy. The big guests will have done 20 or so interviews in the week before your interview, so keep them interested.
 - Finish up the interview by thanking your guest for their time.

After the interview:

If your guest is rather famous, SYN wants them to create a sweeper with them. It can be as simple as, "this is so-and-so from wherever, and you're watching/listening to SYN('s show-name)". If Studio 2 is busy, kindly ask the person in there if you could quickly record the sweeper. It should take 1 minute of everybody's time, max.

Live interviews need to be saved for SYN's records, your guest's records and your own personal folio of course. Ensure you or your producer grabs a copy of every interview from Audiolog straight away and files it away appropriately in the Talks Archive.

Prerecorded interviews need to be edited, filed and saved carefully. Be sure to back-up your file and bring a USB stick for your own copy. Do not lose your hard work in the depths of the SYN network!

It is your responsibility to edit your own prerecorded interviews or arrange for someone else to do this for you. Ensure your interviews are tightly edited with any unnecessary waffle or irrelevant bits are cut out. You can even re-record your questions and paste them in, if there were any issues with them.

The audio editing program SYN uses for prerecorded interviews in Studio 2 is Adobe Audition. If you are unsure how to use this program, you should express interest in a SYN Audio Workshop by emailing Nicole at training@syn.org.au.

And remember to always let the Talks Manager know how your interview went, especially if there are any issues. Don't just say it "went good", provide a small summary of your questions and how you felt the guest responded. They need to know how it went in order to make the most of the content, and to communicate to publicists/artists when necessary.

HAPPY (INTERVIEW) HUNTING!

SYN INTERVIEW TEMPLATE

Name: _____ Talent: _____

Date: _____ Contact: _____

Time: _____ Back-up: _____

Idea #1

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Idea #2

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Idea #3

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Idea #4

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Other Notes:
