

Preparing For Interviews

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Before The Interview

Equipment

- Ensure you have the correct equipment.
- Test the equipment. Just because it was working last time does not mean it will work this time.
- Charge the batteries and bring back up power for each recording device. If you are using a battery-operated recorder, take spare batteries. If you are using a video camera, take spare tapes.
- Bring a notepad and spare pens.

Equipment

- You cannot always predict where an interview will go, but know beforehand what you want out of the interview. Knowing why you are interviewing someone gives the interview purpose.
- Do plenty of research on the topic of the interview before the interview takes place.
- Do not rely on one source for research.
- Research the person you are interviewing. Try to listen to/read previous interviews with the interviewee. This can help you avoid repetitive questions and might prompt other questions.
- Check that you have the name and position/title of the interviewee right. You do not want to get this wrong, especially during a live interview.
- Check your facts. It is embarrassing if the interviewee has to correct you, especially if it is live to air.

- If you are interviewing a musician or band, do not just listen to their latest release.
- If you are interviewing an author about their latest book, read the book.

Press Releases

Press releases can be useful. They can prompt ideas for interviews and questions, but there are a few things to keep in mind:

- A press release has an agenda. A press release tells you what one person or one organisation wants it to tell you.
- Do not take the organisation/person behind the press release at face value. Verify the source of the press release.
- Do not take the information in a press release at face value. If you would like to interview someone about an issue presented in a press release, do it, but do your own research and ask your own questions.
- If possible, contact people directly for interviews.
- Always do further research. You should not rely on a single source when researching and that applies to press releases.

The Script

- Think about the information that readers or listeners need to know to grasp the issue and limit the script to that information.
- Do not overload the script with information. Keep it concise.
- When writing questions, think about what the audience would want to know.
- Do not prepare too many questions. Write down about 4-5 questions for the interview. Remember to know what you want from the interview and base the questions around that.
- Keep the questions short, direct and open-ended.

The Interview

- Never show up late for an interview. Be early to ensure the interview is properly set up and the equipment is working.
- Treat the interviewee with respect. Be polite when greeting them.
- Never provide the interviewee with questions. If they would like to know what the 'themes' of the interview are, it is fine to give them a general idea, but never give them the questions. The interview loses its immediacy and it gives the interviewee the opportunity to rehearse their answers.
- Legally and ethically, you must have a person's consent before recording an interview with them. It is a good idea to tell the interviewee once you have started recording. This is courteous and it ensures that the interviewee is fully aware that they are being recorded.
- Listen to the interviewee. If you do not listen properly, you will miss interesting details. If you listen, you can pick up the threads of what they are saying. It is obvious when an interviewer is not listening to their interviewee and people can tell when the interviewer is not interested. If the interviewer is not interested, the audience may not be interested.
- Try not to spend the whole interview staring at your notes. They are a reference point only and it is distracting for both you and the interviewee if you are looking down.
- There is no need to nod your head repeatedly during the interview. Keep your head still, and if you are interviewing someone face-to-face, make eye contact.
- Remember your research. If the interviewee mentions something specific and you have done your research, you can follow it up with a question.
- You do not have to rely entirely on the questions you have written down. Depending on the interview, the discussion may go in a different direction. Let it. If the discussion loses momentum, you can always refer back to your prepared questions.
- The idea of a current affairs interview is not to aggravate the interviewee, but you can still ask challenging questions. Asking a challenging question is not rude. The interviewee agreed to be interviewed on record and you have a right to ask questions of them.

- If the interviewee becomes combative or irritated, stay calm. Do not be afraid to cut in if the interviewee is not answering the question. It is your interview, and you are in control of it.
- If you only need a 5-minute interview, do not record 20 minutes of audio. You will spend too long editing the audio and it is a waste of yours and the interviewee's time. Do the research, know what you want from the interview and keep the questions short and direct.
- If the interviewee asks to redo their answer to a question, do not allow them to, unless their answer was factually incorrect.
- Always thank the interviewee for their time.

This fact sheet was compiled with the help of [Media Helping Media](#) and the advice of [Jaldeep Katwala](#). [Media Helping Media](#) is a website providing free training resources, aimed especially at those involved in the media in transition states, post-conflict countries and areas where freedom of expression and media freedom is under threat.

About the writer

Mary Kozlovski, 22, joined SYN Media in 2006. She has since worked at SYN as a reporter, presenter, executive producer, project manager and is currently a SYN radio trainer. Mary has a Bachelor of Arts (Media and Communications) from The University of Melbourne and her writing has been published in Farrago and Voiceworks. Mary has been a radio presenter at community stations 3CR and 3RRR.