

MODULE A: INTERVIEW TECHNIQUES

Our interviewers did a day of training on interview technique with Lucy Bell of Documental Theatre Company (see definition and links section). This section of the resource draws on some of the things they did as part of this training, and provides some examples of good and bad practice both from our interviews and from the wider media.

Three words are important when conducting interviews:

- Motivation
- Contextualisation
- Preparation

Motivation:

Choose who you want to interview carefully – you need to be interested in them and motivated to hear their stories. Be able to explain why this person interests you.

Contextualisation:

Think about how this person fits into the wider stories you want to tell. How do they fit with other people you might be interviewing? Do they provide similar or contrasting lived experience?

Preparation:

It's really important to be prepared for the interview, both in terms of the research you've done on the person and in making sure you have a set of positive interview techniques. Follow the tasks in this section to make sure you are as prepared as you can possibly be.

PART ONE: GOOD INTRODUCTIONS

Make sure you have done some research on the person you'll be interviewing and think about how to present this. Even if you're not filming the interview, giving an introduction will help break the ice with the interviewee and reassure them that you have taken some time in advance to find out about them.

Task: Look at Harry's introduction to his dad. We've annotated the positive things about it. What else can you add? Now make a list of factual things Harry has included.

Task: Watch the first 2 minutes of Loose Women Andrea McLean's introduction to the interview with Mel B (2009). https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ef2OzMoT_wc

- What do you think of the presenter's introduction to Mel B?
- What facts does the presenter include in her introduction?
- How does the presenter try to engage us in the link leading into the video clips?

Task: Look at Matt's introduction to Tom. Think about how Matt has researched this background information and what he's chosen to include. Now think of a person you know well, or someone famous who you admire. If you were going to introduce them to someone who doesn't know them, what would you include? Write this introduction and share with someone else in your group.

You might choose to use some visual resources with interviewees to provoke memories and stories. Look at where resources are used in the NYC interviews:
Rachel @ 12.32 mins; Steve @ 14.16 mins, Tom @ 9.05 mins.

Task: Discuss what sharing these materials adds to the interviews. How do the interviewees react? Choose someone you know well or a celebrity you admire. What could you take to the interview that might unlock more memories or stories?

PART TWO: DESIGNING YOUR QUESTIONS

This section includes examples of our interviewers designed their questions. You will see they range from the first scribbled ideas and notes to some fully formed questions of Ollie's for Rona. Think about the background your interviewer has, their connection to the subject matter, and their lived experience.

Task: In pairs, A asks B the following questions:

- Do you like school?
- Do you meet your friends during break?
- Is homework set every day?
- Do you eat school dinners?

Discuss together which of these questions led to the most detailed answers. Why was that?

Now B will ask A these questions:

- What do you like about school?
- What do you do during break-time?
- How much homework do you receive?
- What do you think of school dinners?

Discuss how framing the same questions slightly differently led to different answers. Which set of questions generated the best answers? Why?

Tip: Open and Closed questions - Closed questions often prompt the short response "Yes" or "No". Sometimes people expand on them, but they don't have to - and it can make for an awkward and not very insightful interview if you end up with a string of one-word answers.

Task: Look at Ollie's questions for Rona. Discuss which ones you like and which ones might not generate as much information.

Task: Asking difficult questions and responding to emotional answers. Have a look at Isabel's interview with Julie where Julie talks about her dad (13.40 mins). Discuss the way Isabel responds to this. What makes her response so good?

PART THREE: CREATING GOOD RAPPORT WITH YOUR INTERVIEWEE

It's really important that you connect with the person you're interviewing. Although you may have set questions, don't be worried about departing from this as the interview progresses.

Task: Have a look at Isabel's interview with Julie (7:05 to 9:20) talking about different styles of show that Julie loves to see at the Northcott, and her connection to the shows - notice how Isabel is engaged with the conversation and asking follow up questions, and adding to what Julie is saying.

Discuss the affect this has on the tone of the interview.

PART FOUR: LISTENING SKILLS

Think about how you'll get the best out of your interview. One of the most important things will be the quality of your listening. Listening is about words, silences and body language.

Words:

The way you respond to another person is key to whether they keep talking, or expand on their subject matter. It might be a sentence, like "I never knew that about you. Can you tell me more about that?" Or it might be a word like "Wow!" or "yes?"

Silences

Sometimes listening is about knowing when not to interrupt and to stay quiet. This leads to....

Body Language:

Think about what you do with your head, eyes, mouth, hands, feet, posture. What makes for positive listening?

Task: In pairs, ask your partner a series of open ended questions about what they did at the weekend. Do this back to back. Now conduct the same interview again, but this time sit looking at each other. Note the differences between the two. What is the difference in facing each other? How did the person being interviewed feel in each situation?

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BZ_uOugof-U Look at the first 9 mins 30 seconds of this clip in which Jamie Windust interviews Ade Adepitan. Make notes on what you notice about Jamie's listening style. Comment on words, silences and body language.

Task: In 3s, appoint an interviewer, an interviewee and an observer. The observer's job is to watch the interview without interrupting and note down all the good things they see about positive listening skills. Feed back to the other two and then swap roles so that everyone has a chance in each role.

PART FIVE: GOOD AND BAD PRACTICE

Look at this interview between presenter Russell Harty and pop star and model Grace Jones (1980). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XLLtS50UCBQ>

Task: Watch the first 2 mins 30 seconds. Note down what you think of Russell Harty's approach. Comment on his vocabulary, listening skills, body language and the attitude this all conveys about what he thinks of Grace Jones. This interview happened over 40 years ago. Do you think you would see this kind of interview today?

Look at this interview between Hot One's host Sean Evans and actor Dave Harbour. <https://youtu.be/ZOfVbtOUhU0?t=19>

Task: Watch the following clips and discuss the questions.

Clip 1: (Time: 0:19 - 0:40)

- What do you think of the way Sean introduces David to the show?
- Is there anything that stands out as being good technique?

Clip 2: (Time: 3:19 - 6:37)

- Thinking about how the Sean structures the questions, do you notice anything that is different to how you may expect?
- What do you think about David's reactions to the questions? Why does he react that way and what do you think Sean is doing to elicit that response?
- Having a serious question about Shakespeare and acting, followed by a more light-hearted and personal question about David's life visibly makes David relax more and open up more. Whilst also allowing the audience to take an interesting journey.

Clip 3: (Time: 21:43 - 24:09)

- What do you think about the way Sean wraps up the interview? Is the final question important?
- The final question is just as important as the first - it is the thing that the interviewee will go away remembering most clearly.

Look at this interview between BBC Radio 1's Ali Plumb and actor Tom Holland.

<https://youtu.be/ykpPygy5ozY?t=450>

Task: Watch the following clips and discuss the questions.

Clip 1: (Time: 7:30 - 12:28)

- What are similarities and differences you notice between the Sean Evans/David Harbour interview, and this one?
- Which interview did you prefer, and why?

Look at this interview between James Corden and singer Celine Dion.

<https://youtu.be/dsUURLFnr9k?t=574>

Task: Watch the following clips and discuss the questions.

Clip 1: (Time: 9:34 - 10:40)

- What are similarities and differences you notice between the other two interviews and this one?
- In both the David Harbour interview and this one, they are doing something whilst being interviewed. What do you think about the idea of doing something with your interviewee whilst talking? Do you think the interviews are more authentic and truthful, or is it just a gimmick to keep an audience interested?