

# **INTERVIEWING**

**(Excerpted from BBC Producers' Guidelines)**

## **Objective**

An interview should have a clear and specific journalistic purpose. It should be particular to a given interviewee and to a point in time. Beware of inviting people to appear simply because they are major players in a running news story and without a clear and cogent idea of what we want to find out from them.

Our interviewing should be well-informed. We should have knowledge of the interviewee's previously expressed views on the matter in question.

We should usually be looking for new information. Poorly considered interviews are likely to founder and waste the audience's time because they do not encourage the interviewee to add to the record.

## **Preparation**

Careful preparation by the production team - not just the interviewer - is called for. Propositions to be put to the interviewee should be precisely framed; the possible responses considered; and follow-up lines of questioning worked out. Expert advice can often be given by the BBC's specialist correspondents and should be sought. The interviewer should have supporting evidence ready. Good preparation helps interviewers to be flexible in responding to what is being said. Ill-considered or poorly researched ideas allow a competent interviewee to sweep them aside. This can be embarrassing for the interviewer, the programme and the BBC.

## **Even-handedness**

BBC interviewers in impartial programmes should not cross the line and appear to viewers and listeners personally to be sympathetic to a particular position. They should appear tough-minded, sharp, skeptical and informed - but not partial, committed or emotionally attached to one side of an argument. They should avoid impressions of bias through tone and inflexion or through careless wording. The BBC should be known for a dispassionate approach to contentious issues.

## **Tone and Tactics**

Interviews should be searching and to the point. They should always be well-mannered, not aggressive, hectoring or rude, whatever the provocation.

Questions which attempt to disorient an interviewee - "Are you in this mess because you are dishonest or just foolish" - are out of place in the BBC. They are likely to be as counter-productive as they are discourteous. They will often make the audience hostile to the interviewer and sympathetic to the interviewee. In a well conducted interview, listeners and viewers regard the interviewer and working on their behalf. Interviewers should try to retain their support.

The tone and approach for ordinary people who find themselves as interviewees has to be appropriate. They are not likely to be experienced in broadcasting and we need to make sure they are not talked down to, nor intimidated by brusque questioning.

### **Fairness to the Interviewee**

Natural justice calls for interviewees to be given a fair chance to set out their full response to the questions. This is particularly important with the first reply. But interviewers have to contend increasingly with professional and trained interviewees who are skilled at filibustering.

### **Dealing with Evasion**

Powerful people are increasingly schooled in using an interview as a platform and avoiding its proper purpose. Evasion should be exposed. This should be done coolly and politely - if necessary by repeating the question and explaining to the interviewee and the audience why the previous answer did not address it. Long-winded questions which contain obvious assumptions are more easily evaded or challenged than pointed questions which require a response.

### **Interviews for Elucidation**

Not all interviews will be challenging. Some are important for elucidation and the techniques appropriate to this purpose are different from those used to test the stance of public figures on controversial issues. People interviewed as eye-witnesses or as experts may need to be encouraged rather than challenged.