
UNIT 7 INTERVIEWS: TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES

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7.0 INTRODUCTION

Interview is one of the highly practiced techniques of gathering information in the field of journalism through a one-to-one conversation between an interviewer (journalist) and interviewee. Interviewee is a respondent and he or she may be a celebrity or a news source or an expert of any field or a victim of crime/disaster or an official of any organisation or a distinguished personality. The interaction may occur in a studio or at any venue of mutual convenience or simply over a telephonic call or internet based text chatting, but it is important to mention that interview is a conversation between two persons only. If the dialogue is not one-to-one, it is not an interview; however it may be either of any other appearance of a journalistic endeavor, like a panel discussion, debate, press conference or press meet.

Information obtained in an interview is regarded as the most authentic and reliable piece of journalistic content, in so far as the personal opinion, views and perception of an interviewee is concerned. Although an interviewer actually executes the interview, but he or she is considered as a sheer facilitator, who conceives, plans, steers and processes every ins and outs of the interview, but is ideally not allowed to impose one's own opinion, views and perception to the final output at the end.

7.1 LEARNING OUTCOMES

This unit will enable you to:

- conceive an interview.
- prepare for an interview.
- hone your interviewing skills.
- present an interview in a variety of formats and media
- appreciate various ethical and practical issues.

7.2 IMPORTANCE OF THE INTERVIEW

There are various formats for creating media content. A journalist plans and works differently on gathering raw material (information) that suits these different formats. As per specification of the subject matter, a journalist designs his or her course of action to craft an appropriate form of journalistic output to be delivered. In this framework, an Interview involves a special kind of pursuance to extract important and newsworthy of information through one-to-one conversation. In this process, a journalist tries to unearth hidden truths, ideas, opinion and views of a person, with whom he or she is having this interview. Importance of interview is it's liveliness that connects the audience to the content and appearance of the personality, in a way that the conversation between interviewer and interviewee becomes an integral part of audiences' personal memory, because in an interview they get thoroughly involved in the conversation. Also, in the process of an interview there is always a scope of revelation and sharing of some untold stories and thoughts by the interviewee.

7.3 BASIC TOOLS OF INTERVIEW: THE PREPARATION

An interviewer should be knowledgeable. He or she should have adequate knowledge of the concerned field on subject matter and that of an interviewee. He should be clear in views, have ability to design a conversation and should talk and behave politely. Above all, an interviewer should have good memory and interpreting ability. In addition to all these aforesaid qualities, an interviewer prepares well for obtaining and presenting a good piece of interview. This preparation is actually a compilation and collaboration of basic tools of the interview, which have been elaborated in the sections that follow.

7.3.1 Whom to Interview

Purpose of the interview is to create valuable and newsworthy media content, but the first and the most important question before planning an interview is – Who is to be interviewed and why? Interviewee should be a source of valuable and noteworthy information. He or she may be a celebrity or a news source or an expert of any field or a victim of crime/disaster or an official of any organisation or a distinguished personality.

Selection of interviewee depends on nature and temperament of the program (in electronic media) and nature and temperament of magazine or page in a newspaper

(in print media). Apart from news sources or victims of a crime/disaster or an official of any organisation, who are usually interviewed to enrich the news content, there is also a wide range of interviewees from the fields of politics, social work, arts, literature, sports, fashion, cinema, economics, commerce, industry and other miscellaneous domains, which shares their due space in the feature section of media. The audience connects with these types of distinguished personalities. They are informed, inspired and entertained by the content, appearance and total audio-visual impact (in electronic media) or verbal-photo impact (in print media) of these interviews of celebrated personalities.

7.3.2 How to Arrange an Appointment

After determining name of an interviewee, most important and difficult task is to get him or her ready to share his feelings and opinions with you as an interviewer.

In a case of interviewing for a news report, a reporter has to record the first hand experiences of victims, but most of the time, victims choose to abstain from speaking. This can be due to trauma of victimisation or fear of someone who may have stopped him or her from commenting or sharing their sufferings. Also, distrust on an interviewer and lack of confidence can restrict a possible news source from being a part of the interview process.

In cases of interviewing interviewees from fields of politics, social workers, arts, literature, sports, fashion, cinema, economics, commerce, industry and other miscellaneous domains, getting an appointment of the distinguished personality is a tough task, because these personalities have a busy schedule of engagements and seriously lack the availability of free time to converse with an interviewer. Confidence and reliance in the role and representation of a journalist or Media organisation makes the process of getting appointment easier.

An interviewer develops various links and contacts to approach such distinguished personalities for appointments. Interviewees are contacted through phone calls or e-mail to fix an appointment and venue of a prearranged interview. Journalists keep in contact with various Public Relation Organisations, who also help in arranging these appointments.

On the other hand, sometime, some celebrities approach a well-known interviewer or media organisation to offer his or her interview. This is done as a part of a Public Relation Drill or a promotion of any product, endorsed by these celebrities. This is a typical type of interview, in which a Public Relation Organisation becomes facilitator and interviewer does not have to worry about the Interview's execution except asking some fine questions from the interviewee and disseminating them to make the interview more lucrative.

While taking appointment for interview, following points should be kept in mind—

- An interviewer should clearly communicate his name and a brief introduction to the interviewee. One should also make sure that the interviewee gets your contact details, which can be used in case he or she wants to call you back.
- The interviewee should be made aware of the media organisation and medium, where the proposed interview will feature.
- The interviewer should explain the purpose of the interview, elaborating the planned theme of the proposed interview.

- If necessary, the deadline of the interview should also be conveyed, so that the interviewee can give an appointment beforehand.
- In case, an interviewee asks for a brief, written introduction of the theme of proposed interview, it should be communicated very promptly.
- After getting the appointment, an interviewer should e-mail a tentative planning of the interview. This planning should include date, time, venue, theme and duration of the interview.
- The interviewee must be aware of the mode of transportation to the venue. Who will arrange transportation of interviewee to the venue should also be made clear.
- On the pre-determined date of the interview, the interviewer should send a gentle reminder to the interviewee via a text message or e-mail, reminding of the scheduled interview in the day.

7.3.3 Research and Preparing for Interview

It is advised to research well, before conducting an interview. In the due course of researching fundamentals of the subject matter for an interview, an interviewer should go through the recent works of the interviewee. Also, an interviewer should have a vivid understanding of the nature and sensitivity of the issue to be discussed and explored in prescribed span of the interview. An interviewer can go through books, check archives, and consult online materials available. A well researched interviewer has the capability to face an interviewee and put some noteworthy queries.

Apart from researching subject matter, an interviewer should design and structure a list of questions to be asked. Although, framing questions in an interview may be extempore, but it is wiser to have a set of questions prepared beforehand and serve them in an appropriate sequence during an interview. When an interviewer comes with a good preparation, interviewee can feel how imperative the interview is to the interviewer. This seriousness of interviewer makes interviewee more confident of his or her ability to interview.

Though it is a tough task, but after due preparation and research on subject matter and interviewee, an interviewee should learn to be free from all kind of prejudice and preconceived notions. He or she should be aware of facts, but should not implicate his or her personal views and idea logy, while conducting an interview.

7.3.4 Do's and Don'ts for any Interview

While conducting an interview, an interviewer should keep in mind following list of do's–

- Interviewer should be proactive.
- Interviewer should be prudent
- Interviewer should be polite.
- Interviewer should be precise.
- Interviewer should be persistent to theme of pre-defined theme of the interview.

- Interviewer should be to the point.
- Interviewer should be punctual.
- Interviewer should follow the prescribed format of column (in print media) and program (in electronic media)
- Interviewer should have a good pronunciation (in case of interview of electronic media)

While conducting an interview, an interviewer should keep in mind following list of don'ts –

- Interviewer should not beat about the bush.
- Interviewer should not put his words in interviewee's mouth.
- Interviewer should not deviate from a pre-defined subject of the interview.
- Interviewer should not blame or charge an interviewee of any kind of crime, corruption or controversy without physical availability of a valid documentary proof in this context.
- Interviewer should not talk on personal issues of the interviewee, unless he or she has taken permission beforehand.
- Interviewer should not misquote anyone to have an interviewee's comment to create a sensation.
- Interviewer should not ask a hypothetical question to an interviewee, as these questions are meaningless and never leads to a decisive conclusion.

Check Your Progress 1

Note: 1) Use the space given below for your answer
2) Compare your answer with those given at the end of this Unit.

1. Explain the process of obtaining an appointment for interview.

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Check Your Progress 2

Note: 1) Use the space given below for your answer
2) Compare your answer with those given at the end of this Unit.

1. What are platforms on which research works can be done before executing an interview?

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7.4 TECHNIQUES OF INTERVIEW: INTERVIEWING SKILLS

Conducting a good piece of interview is a matter of using most suitable set of techniques. These techniques are learnt and achieved through continuous process of observing and getting experiences through performance or by assisting others in performing an interview. This is how interviewing skills are earned. Interviewing skills include following ingredients.

7.4.1 The Start

While conducting an interview, a journalist should be polite, attentive, precise and to the point. He or she should not beat around the bush. Before starting a formal interview, the journalist must check following things.

- There should be least distraction at the venue of the interview. The atmosphere of the venue should be favourable for one-to-one conversation. Presence of any person or material, which can cause distraction, should be kept away from the surroundings of the interview. Mobile Phones should be switched off. If recording is being done on the mobile phone, then Aeroplane mode should be turned on.
- Check the functioning of instruments of recording interview. The conversation in an interview cannot be remembered by human brains. Either it has to be noted down or recorded for future reference. The interviewer must check that his pen is working well and he has enough blank of paper in case the interview is to be noted down. In the case of interviews for Television or Radio, it is mandatory to check that the required recording device is working properly.
- The rationale of the interview should be explained to the interviewee. Before starting the talk, interviewer should briefly introduce and explain the topics on which the interviewee has to respond. This prior explanation, gives interviewee adequate time to prepare to respond in the interview with accuracy.
- Interviewer should thank the interviewee for giving an appointment. This makes the interviewee feel good. With a friendly start, he or she can come forward with some new and fresh revelation, may be completely unknown to the interviewer.
- Most of the time, the journalist knows the details and truth of the subject matter to be discussed and he or she needs only authentication, affirmation and substantiation for the interviewee. In this type of situation, one should not start with that one 'desired question'. It may happen that the interviewee cancels the talk to avoid answering any uneasy question. At first an interviewer needs to attain a basic comfort level with interviewee. Therefore, the conversation should start with easy and relaxing questions. The interviewer should make interviewee feel comfortable and confident.
- Beginning of interview with friendly queries and comments builds trust and a soothing environment. He or she expects a friendly conversation that may not push him or her in an awkward situation. It engages interviewee to the whole process of the interview, so that he or she starts enjoying and

contributing more to the interview. In this way the content thus generated acquires better-off and more interesting substance.

After checking and assuring about the abovementioned points, an interviewer should start a formal conversation.

7.4.2 Conducting an Interview

Once the interview has formally been started, now the interviewer has a responsibility to steer the talk in the direction, where he or she can fetch maximum response from the interviewee and reveal some hidden facts. For this purpose, the interviewer should keep in mind the following things –

- Interviewer should visualise a tentative scene of the planned interview. Accordingly, a sequence of questions and structure of conversation should be pre-planned. The questions should have the potential of answering every aspects of the phenomenon or issue. If the interviewee starts talking about something else, other than what was expected or visualised earlier, he or she should be allowed to continue only if something more important or noteworthy is believed to be revealed.
- The interviewer should study and research about the basics of the subject matter but should never ask basic factual information which can be obtained elsewhere. He or she should be aware of the credentials of the interviewee and also cannot afford to be ignorant of the issues and ideas related to the theme of the interview.
- To reveal a hidden matter, an interviewer should outline the basic idea of the subject and asks interviewee of his or her comment. But, the interviewer should not start teaching or preaching.
- An interviewer should avoid types of question, which could possibly be answered in terms of only ‘yes’ or ‘no’. Answer, in terms of only ‘yes’ or ‘no’, does not put significant value in the content of the interview.
- Interviewer should speak less and allow interviewee to speak more. After asking a question, interviewer should remain silent and let interviewee to speak as much as it suits the schedule and format of the interview. The interviewer should never interrupt an interviewee, unless the later is shifting from the basic theme of the conversation or misinterpreting the question asked.
- Questions, asked by interviewers should be clear, precise and to the point. An interviewer should not repeat the same questions and should never complicate the talk. Questions should be such that demand to the point answers and explanations in a polite manner. It should never be baseless blaming, denouncing or indecent provocation by an interviewer. Remember that an interview is a conversation and it should not become a confrontation.
- It is responsibility of an interviewer to have full control over the interview. Questions should remain around core theme of interview; conversation should not deviate to other domain of issues and questions. In process of having control over the interview an interviewer uses some simple interviewing tools known as *Bridge and Flag*.

Reporting Techniques

- Bridge is the tool through which an interviewer smoothly makes an effective transition between topics. Like while walking one safely crosses over a river through a bridge, in the same way an interviewer tends to switch over from one topic to another. There are some proven phrases and sentences like – ‘You may be correct, but we need to know...’, ‘In addition to what you said, our concern is...’ and ‘Very politely, I need to mention that our study shows a different picture...’ – work as a bridge in an interview.
- Other tool of controlling a conversation in an interview is to Flag. Generally, an interviewer uses the technique of Flagging to highlight a specific comment or instance, revealed in an interview. It can be done by stressing on any specific note by verbally flagging it with phrases like ‘most important fact’ or ‘a critical point’ or ‘point to be remembered’.
- The interviewer should be attentive and show his or her full involvement through the body language. He or she should be full of empathy, but should also maintain a distance from the interviewee. Here, empathy builds confidence for the interviewer, but on the other hand, maintaining a distance helps him or her to raise questions as an indifferent entity.
- An interviewer should be aware of the time and accordingly should schedule the questions and give appropriate time for their answers. He or she should not be trapped in one issue. He/she should have the ability to forgo an unnecessary discussion and turn the discussion to an interesting and meaningful plane.
- In the case of Radio or Television interviews, an interviewer should follow the instructions given by the program producer, who virtually controls the programming of the interview and instructs the interviewer from the control room with help of modern communication technology, available at studio or OB Vans (Outside Broadcasting Vans).
- If an interviewer misses a name or quotation used by the interviewee, he or she should ask and clarify it before the summation. In case, an interviewer finds any inaccuracy or error in the interviewee’s submission, one can point it out and confirm what the speaker actually wanted to say.
- In cases of audio-visual interview, an interviewer should keep pace with proceedings of the interview. It should neither be too fast or too slow. The pace of interview should be moderate and should be able to entertain the audience.
- An audio-visual interviewer should be the perfect master of using voice to draw attention and emphasise on a topic or transition from one topic. He or she should be aware of excellent use of pause, tone, words and voice modulation in the interview. Interviewer should be full of energy, but should never try to use jargons to draw undue attention.
- If an interview is being conducted for visual media, an interviewer should also take care of his clothing and make-up. Background of the studio or shooting spot should be soothing and there should be good visual impact.
- In an interview for visual media, facial expression of an interviewer should be polite and sober. One should smile at appropriate comment only. Gestures should be gentle and an interviewer should not pose to distract anyone. Shoulders should not be hunched and interviewer should sit straight and not lean on one side.

7.4.3 Summing Up an Interview

Towards the end of the interview, there should be a round of recapitulation. At this step, an interviewer should clear any doubt that may have occurred in the ongoing talk and have clarification on any topic, that has not been answered satisfactorily.

When an interviewer thinks that he or she has finished the talk, one last question may be asked. 'Anything else you want to share with us and convey to our readers/audience?' If the interviewer needs photographs of the interview, he or she should either assign this task to a photographer or do it himself or herself after the end of formal interview conversation.

The interviewee should have contact details of interviewer and vice-versa. In case of an important issue, if interviewee wants to update any information, he or she should feel free to connect with the interviewer, so that there remains a chance of updated interview till the deadline or closing for print of the edition (In case of Print Media). In case of electronic media, exchange of contact details of interviewer and interviewee can be manifested in future prospects of obtaining any updates on the issue.

At last, it is courteous to thank and convey parting salutation to the interviewee.

7.4.3 Presentation of an interview

Presentation of an interview depends on the medium of its dissemination and format of the column (in print media) and the program (in electronic media).

You should take into consideration following points, while presenting an interview for print media –

- Heading of the interview should be precise and representing the most important revelation in the interview.
- An interview should start with a brief introduction of the interviewee and appropriate description of the subject matter discussed.
- Highlights of interview can be offered as a box item.
- Transcription of recorded interview should be perfect and only grammatical error should be corrected.
- Questions asked in real-time interview and their answers can be re-arranged to make reading more interesting, smooth and flawless. But, in this exercise meaning and sense of responses of the interviewee should remain the same as said in real-time interview.
- While answering a question, it may happen that an interviewee starts saying more than the answer of the asked question. If these points are otherwise relevant and important, then they may be included in the interview as an answer of a suitable question. In this case, according to the answer a question is framed at the time of presenting the interview.
- Language of the question asked may be made more catchy, but it should mean and sense exactly the same as the question asked in the interview.

- While editing a piece of interview, repetition of a fact and unnecessary conversation can be omitted.

Presenting an interview for electronic media, a journalist has two ways for completing this assignment. One is live interview and other is edited interview. In live interview, interview gets broadcasted or telecasted in real-time and there is no space for post-interview editing. In recorded or edited interview, editing can be done to present interview in a better than actual form. You should take into consideration following points in conducting an interview for electronic media –

- An interview should start with a briefing of the interview package, which should include introduction of the interviewee and subject matter on which the conversation would take place. This introduction package should be written in advance and should be read out by the interviewer through teleprompter. Some experienced interviewers choose to do this package extempore, but it depends on his or her personal ability.
- Graphics for elaborating facts, figures, Montage and backgrounders etc should be well prepared in advance.
- An interviewer should follow instructions of program producer, when camera starts rolling.
- Editing of an audio-visual interview is completely different subject and it covers various skills. These skills can be discussed in the chapters of Video Editing.

Check Your Progress 3

Note: 1) Use the space given below for your answer
 2) Compare your answer with those given at the end of this Unit.

1. Explain how an interrogation is different from an interview with examples.

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7.5 ETHICAL ISSUES OF THE INTERVIEW

There are some ethical guidelines that an interviewer should follow while conducting and presenting an interview. Following these guidelines would help build the reputation of an interviewer into a more authentic and dependable person.

- Procedures and schedule of the interview should be well documented and handed over to the interviewee in hand or by e-mail before actual commencement of the interview.
- Venue, time and duration should be decided in consultation with the interviewee. Once decided, the interviewer should stick to it very seriously.
- Interviewer should be punctual and if decided earlier, he or she should arrange for a transport to bring interviewee to the venue before time, so that

the interviewee has reasonable time to relax and prepare for interview.

- The interviewer should not feel harassed or interrogated during the interview. Remember that the interview is a conversation; it should not be made a confrontation.
- The interviewer should not reveal anything said by interviewee off the record.
- If the interviewer thinks that any revelation by interviewee can harm anyone in any way, he or she should confirm with the interviewee by asking, ‘Are you saying this on record?’ or ‘Should I note this point as on record?’
- The interviewer should not put words in mouth of interviewee. However, he or she may suggest a better explanation only for later approval.

7.6 LET US SUM UP

Interview is a piece of feature, which is covered through a conversation between interviewer and interviewee. We can sum up this the unit with the following points:

- There should be a sound preparation before the interview.
- Check equipments of recording the interview.
- Interviewer should speak less and let interviewee speak more.
- Interviewer should be polite, but persistent in asking question.
- Questions asked should be clear, precise and to the point.
- Interviewer should cross-check the data and information provided by interviewee before preparing the final draft of the interview.
- Interview should free from any bias and prejudice.

7.7 FURTHER READING

1. Gail Sedorkin (2011, 2nd Ed.) Interviewing: A Guide for Journalists and Writers, Allen & Unwin, Auckland, New Zealand
2. John Brady (1976) The Craft of Interviewing, Vintage Books, New York
3. David Spark & Geoffrey Harris (2012, 4th Ed.) Practical Newspaper Reporting, Sage Publications India Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi
4. Lawrence Grobel (2004) The Art of the Interview: Lessons from a Master of the Craft, Three Rivers Press, New York

7.8 KEY WORDS

Interviewer : The Person, who conducts the interview

Interviewee : The Person, who is being interviewed

Reporting Techniques

- On the record** : Remarks made by an interviewee, which he or she intends to be disseminated through the interview
- Off the record** : Remarks made by an interviewee, which he or she does not intend to be disseminated through the interview. The comment may be informal, unofficial or confidential, which should not be revealed in public.
- Bridge** : A transitional statement, which is used for shifting from one topic to another.
- Flag** : An interviewer or interviewee uses some phrases to highlight any statement or topic in an interview.
- Montage** : The technique of selecting, editing and piecing together separate sections of film to form a continuous whole. This is used in a background of shooting spot of an interview.

7.9 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS: POSSIBLE ANSWERS

Check Your Progress 1: 7.3.2

Check Your Progress 2: 7.3.3

Check Your Progress 3: 7.4.3