

Digital Media and Video Training for Refugee Groups

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A new project: Climate Change, Migration and Asylum

by Virtual Migrants, RICC and MRSN in association with Exodus by CAN

HANDOUT for Session 1 (B): Interview skills.

Tutor: Kooj (Kuljit) Chuhan

Introduction.

Interviews are a very efficient way of creating content — cheap to produce, effective for gathering and presenting information, and easy to edit into the program.

This is a situation in which you must get everything right first time and make the job flow smoothly and comfortably for everyone involved. Interviews will quickly fall apart if things start going wrong or taking a long time.

Our project is not TV news style; the reporter will never appear on camera, and the reporter's voice will be edited out of the final version.

LEGAL: Use an **IMAGE RELEASE FORM** to have official permission to use this video.

ANONYMOUS INTERVIEWS: disguise, silhouette or shoot the hands of the person, or other methods.

CREATING QUESTIONS THAT WILL TELL YOUR STORY OR NARRATIVE:

Ask questions that will help you build your 'dramatic arc'. In a nutshell:

1. How did you get started doing this? (Beginning/Exposition)
2. What obstacles have you encountered along the way? (Middle/Conflict)
3. How did you overcome them? (Middle/Resolution)
4. What is your ultimate goal? (End/Denouement).

Preparing for an interview involves:

- Contacting and making arrangements with the guest(s)
- Choosing a location
- Preparing equipment
- Traveling to the location and setting up
- Final briefing and technical checks

PREPARATION

- **Story and subject:**
 - Start by knowing which **specific story points** you want the interview to address. The interview is not the time to discover what your story is about. You should already know that before you enter the room for the interview.
- **Questions**
 - While it's OK to tell your source ahead of time the topics you plan to discuss during your interview, I would not recommend sending them your questions in advance.
 - If your source has too much time to prepare, their answers are likely to sound scripted and stilted and even fake – that's not the way people talk.

SETTING UP

- **Informal introduction**
 - Get comfortable talking with the person *before* you set up all the camera gear. Establish a human connection. Let the person see that you care about him or her. Are you

nervous? The other person might be MORE nervous. Your interviewee is valuable to you. Show it.

- **Run-through**
 - Interview people first without the camera rolling
 - This way, they can think about their responses and provide thoughtful responses.
 - Few people provide good quotes speaking off the cuff with the camera pointed at them
 - So, do a run through, get background info you need, and then get quotes from them on camera
- As you are setting up the equipment, don't make the person sit or stand in place until you're almost ready.
- After the person is in place, use the LCD viewfinder and make sure you like **where the subject is looking**. The person will want to look at you, and that is good. Do not stand directly behind the camera, but do stand close to it.

FILMING

- **TRIPOD**: Use a tripod or stabilise the camera for interviews.
- **GET CLOSE**. A big face is good in online video.
- **Position and framing**
 - Leave a little headroom at the top of the frame.
 - Position your subject a little to the left or right of center and leave nose room to the opposite side.
 - And position yourself at same level as subject so viewers won't feel like they are looking up or down.
 - Pay attention to the **BACKGROUND**. (Avoid poles or trees coming out of heads! Look out for distracting items or action behind the person.)
- **Lighting**
 - Pay close attention to the light! If you're in bright sun (I hope not), avoid having the person squinting, but also make sure the sun is not behind the person. In a home, you may need to move the lights. You might even ask for a desk lamp to be carried in from another room to counteract a strong light on one side of the room.
- **Sound interference**
 - Don't, for any reason, make any sound at all when your subject is talking. The camera will pick up every sound you make – a sigh, a cough, a chuckle or anything you say. Even the littlest laugh or "Ummm" from the camera person sounds awful. So keep your lips zipped when recording because you won't be able to edit out the unwanted audio later. Use body language, such as nodding, to indicate to the speaker that you understand them.

Some Advanced Tips for Improving Your Video Interviews and Stories:

1. SPOTLIGHT A CENTRAL CHARACTER

Stories about trends and issues can be made infinitely more gripping by focusing on a single person whose personal story encompasses it.

2. CONDUCT BETTER INTERVIEWS

By far the most important question, infrequently posed, is "Why?". Be sure to *listen* to responses. Keep your questions short and direct, and then shut up and let the subject speak.

Give any person the chance to restate something if it is muddled on the first go round. It is important to ask them to always restart at the beginning of an idea (the paragraph).

3. TRY AND AVOID JUST GENERAL CUTAWAY SHOTS, USE SEQUENCES AND SCENES

A sequence usually is made of several individual shots, usually including wide shots, mid shots and close-ups with its own visually-led story. A group of sequences constitutes a scene.

4. SHOW, DON'T TELL

Look for situations where people are *doing* rather than *describing*.

5. SHOOT BEFORE & AFTER, NOT JUST DURING

The real story usually started before the event, and continues afterward. Good stories are about change.