

Tips for Videotaping Interviews

Depending on the production, these are usually done in a 3rd person omniscient camera perspective where the subject is talking slightly off camera. Watch any documentary format TV show for examples. The key is to not let the subject talk to or look into the camera. By looking slightly off camera at the person asking the interview questions, the subject's responses will both look and sound much more natural.

- **Framing your subject** – Begin with a chest up to just above the head framing with approximately 2/3 open frame in front of the direction of the eyes looking off camera. Occasionally begin with a waist up framing if a background object or establishing background is important to the storyline. The subject's head, shoulders and hips should all be positioned in the same direction - slightly off camera. The person asking the questions (which can be the cameraperson) should stand about 20 inches left or right of camera when asking questions. During the interview, zoom in to tighter shots (neckline to forehead) when the subject's intensity commands attention. If they become excited or emotional, zoom in more and frame them from the eyebrows to the chin. When interviewing several people for the same production, vary left or right between different subjects but keep each subject all left or right framing. Avoid using a wide-angle lens as it can make a subject's features appear fat or distorted. On "large" people, use tighter framing to eliminate unflattering large torso views. Set the camera on a tripod so that you're shooting at the subject's eye level with camera.
- **Selecting the background setting** – Avoid sterile settings such as rooms, porches, or fireplaces. Select a background that supports subject matter. When looking for a natural setting, look for slanted trees with more diagonal lines. Avoid settings with any horizontal and vertical images such as buildings, straight trees or powerlines. For hunters, have the tools of their trade in their hands or slung over their shoulder. If they are recounting a recent hunt, they should be wearing the same hat and clothing. Brimmed hats should be tipped back so the eyes are lit. Avoid black, white or striped garments. Have them remove any distracting jewelry or watches. Avoid distracting backgrounds with other moving people, vehicles or livestock. Avoid settings with distracting background audio of human or machinery noises. Finally, do not allow any observers or bystanders nearby to distract you or the subject.
- **Background and Subject Lighting** - Avoid having more than upper 1/5th sky (burned out) backgrounds by moving subject and/or your camera. Avoid direct sunlight or dark shade. Use sun diffuse screen or place subject in diffuse (shaded) lighting. Use an infill reflector (aluminum foil on cardboard) to remove face shadows when needed. In dawn or dusk settings, fill light the subject's face with a soft floodlight. Zoom into the subject's face and hair area, then lock down exposure before zooming out to frame the scene.
- **Setting your F Stop or aperture** – Set your video camera to your lowest (1.6) manual F stop to compress the depth of focus. Set up your camera about 15 feet from subject and zoom in to the proper framing, which will further compress depth of focus. To focus, zoom in tight and manual focus on the eyes, then zoom back to the proper framing. The background should appear blurry and eyes crisp.
- **Audio** – Use a wireless mic with good batteries and ALWAYS monitor the audio with both headphones and your audiometer. Set voice peaks to -20 dB. Depending on our camera, the Auto level setting may work, however, manual setting is usually safer. The main thing to watch for is that most subjects begin talking with more volume and drop off as they talk. So monitor your audiometer occasionally and readjust when needed. Wire and program the camera so all wireless audio goes to all channels. It's easy to record and blend in natural

audio with clean voice audio if it's needed later. If you or the subject is wearing cell phones, turn them off. They can interfere with wireless mics.

- **Interviewing the subject** – First, make and review your mental or written list of revealing questions. Suggested questions are offered in the separate “Suggested Questions” page. This section is broken down into main points to make things simpler.
 - Begin by chatting and becoming friendly and relaxed with the subject.
 - Talk back and forth about the goals of the interview and possible slants or storylines.
 - Assure the subject that you will make them look and sound great.
 - Encourage smiling, and natural hand and body gestures by showing them an example.
 - Tell them to ignore the camera and to tell their story to your face and eyes.
 - Encourage and prompt the subject with head nods, smiles and face expressions AND MAINTIAN EYE CONTACT. This will make the interview sincere and come alive.
 - Avoid talking to or asking questions when the subject is talking. Although it's natural to say, “un-huh” or “wow” during a normal conversation, this can degrade the audio and focus of your subject.
 - Tell the subject that you may briefly step back behind the camera to check the framing, but to keep looking where you where asking the questions from (20 inches off camera.)

That's it for this part. Please see the list of suggested questions and have fun with your subject and the interview.