

Interviews that ROCK: Getting the Most out of Your Guests
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What you will learn today:

- o how to research an interview & craft a question list
- o how to prep your guest and set him/ her at ease
- o how to forget all that and go with the flow
- o Five Common Interview Pitfalls
- o how to get the most out of an impromptu interview guest

My goal: one thing you can walk away with and implement right away

What to do BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

1) prepare, prepare, prepare

- ◆ Read the book, Google, Technorati, MySpace, previous interviews
 1. their main message (what they enjoy talking about)
 2. what they've been asked a million times
- ◆ Goal: create summary blurb with purpose, goal focus
 1. e.g. [Donna Pappacosta of Trafcom News](#) when interviewed accent expert

2) Question focus

- ◆ General Rule: if it's interesting to you, it's interesting to listeners
- ◆ Ewan Spence of TPN Rock Show: pretend your listener is on your shoulder, saying "ask her THIS!"
- ◆ Balance: 1/2 what your listeners want and 1/2 what guest wants.
 1. Create list of 10 questions and have someone create 10, merge list
 2. Get audience involved! Ask for their questions on blog: if you could interview these people, what are your burning questions?
 - ◇ more engaged and great WOM for interview
 - ◇ SURE what they want to know instead of guessing
- ◆ Goal is to get guests to **tell stories**, especially unexpected ones.
 1. Ewan Spence says "everybody has in them at least one 10-15 minute story that will entertain us"
 2. Ron Harper: The best thing to remember is to LISTEN. Be interested in your guest, rather than have an agenda. Everyone has a story to tell. It's your challenge to find it.

3) Crafting questions

- ◆ Open-ended questions not yes-no
 1. *Why did you decide togo to comedy from movies? ... go into podcasting?*
 2. *What was the biggest reason you ... chose to make scrapbooking into a career? ... refused nomination for presidency?*

3. *When did you realize that ... you were marked as a lesbian writer? ... you were funny?*
4. *Where were you when you ... got the idea for a podcast novel? ... first thought of a kid being a wizard named Harry Potter?*
5. *What experience did you draw on when you wrote/created ... the powerful yet soft character Susan Ivanova?*
6. *Tell me about... your struggle with cystic fibrosis. ... your lifelong obsession with poodles.*

◆ **Let your research show**--gives background for listeners; gives guest license to tell the story

- (a) Terry Gross asked Johnny Cash: *By the time you got to Memphis, Elvis Presley had already recorded "That's All Right Mama" for Sam Phillips on his label, Sun Records. You called Phillips and asked for an audition. Did it take a lot of nerve to make that call?*
- (b) Suzanne Church interviewed Jamie Bamber: *Katee Sakhoff was originally going to be here at Dragon*Con, so I must ask one Starbuck-related question. Apollo has done everything from beating the crap out of Starbuck to shouting out his love for her, sometimes even in the same episode. What's the most fun to shoot?*
- (c) Never got to ask Grant Imahara: *Grant--you are one of several people certified to operate R2D2, you've written a book on creating combat robots and you created a custom circuit for the Energizer Bunny. Are you a "geek" or a "dork"?*
- (d) Paint the scene; [Stephen Colbert interviewing Jeff Toobin](#)
"Everyone knows the Supreme Court is crucial to our democracy, the ultimate voice in our judicial system, lifetime appointments, the decisions cannot be appealed, there could be some changes in the court coming up in the next couple of years; the country is in flux, the court is in flux; let's talk OJ."

4) **Send questions to interviewee?**

- ◆ generally no, just topics/themes/areas to cover
- ◆ experienced interviewee can discover holes in questions
- ◆ inexperienced interviewee--they'll prepare word-for-word answers

Interview itself

1) **Day before--send email reminder** with FOUR bits of info

- ◆ confirm purpose and scope
- ◆ confirm date and time with TIME ZONE in email
- ◆ clarify procedure--you call or Skype them so they don't have to worry
- ◆ verify that they are on a land line, not cell, corded not cordless

2) **Two minutes before: setting guest at ease**

- ◆ let them know it will be edited and they can take a pause and restate
- ◆ HEADPHONES—must wear--I've not worn them and then lost the recordings
 ⇒ Donna Pappacosta says not to wear if in person because it can ## intimidate guest; personal choice

- ◆ **Two minutes before you turn the mic on is most important**
 - (a) Offer to get a beverage
 - (b) Physical contact
 - (c) Ask softball questions to warm up
 - ⇒ How's the show going?
 - ⇒ How was your morning? What did you have for breakfast? How was the flight here?
 - ⇒ Question everyone can answer: How do you pronounce your name? What's your title again?
 - ⇒ **Or do pre-interview:** What's your background? How did you come to be a world-famous knitter? What is this lifelong obsession with the Energizer Bunny?

3) **GO!**

- ◆ Don't forget to hit "Record"
- ◆ **HOW MUCH DO I TALK?**
 - ⇒ Rob Walch of www.podcast411.com says "when in doubt, edit Rob out"
 - ⇒ Terry Gross does recount personal stories
 - ⇒ Ewan Spence points out that you are the familiar in the show
- ◆ **CONCLUSION:** balance, a conversation IS two people, but when in doubt, edit Rob out
 - ⇒ Take pause as an edit point
 - ⇒ Remember: **stories and surprises**
 - ⇒ Also remember listener on your shoulder "Ask her THIS!"

4) **The goal: FLOW**

- ◆ Have a list, but don't stick to it--remember **listening for stories, surprises**
- ◆ Favorite tool four words: "**Really? tell me more!**"
- ◆ Ask for examples:
 - ⇒ *Was there a point where you... decided to give up on the corporate life?*
 - ⇒ *What was your very first experience doing... improv comedy at a festival?*
- ◆ **THREE LETTERS KEY TO GETTING STORY: SUL**
 - ⇒ DON'T BE AFRAID OF SILENCE.
 - ⇒ J Wynia: *When they're done, wait. Wait longer than you're normally comfortable with. That gaping silence bugs 95% of people enough that they will *yearn* for it to be filled and your subject will often do just that with an expansion on their answer or a much deeper statement.*
 - ⇒ if not, just take the pause (edit point!) and go back to your list.
- ◆ **FLO TIP:** put tough questions at end
- ◆ **FLO TIP:** say guest's name a lot, esp. if same gender as you

5) **After--3 things**

- ◆ **1.** Ask how feeling--[Leesa Barnes calls this "asking for permission after"](#)-90% of time fine
- ◆ **2.** Send email: thank, send link and blurb they can use

- ◆ 3. Editing--look for colorful quotes and put up front

Five Common Interview Pitfalls and How to Avoid Them

- 1) How to deal with a pompous blowhard
 - ◆ "Excuse me, this is really interesting, but I know your time is valuable, and I don't want to waste too much more of it; Could we get back to... your lifetime fascination with knitting?"
- 2) What if he's dull and thinks he's really interesting?
 - ◆ End interview ASAP
- 3) What to do if you realize you weren't paying attention?
 - ◆ "To switch gears a bit, I'd like to ask you about... "
- 4) What if they use jargon I don't understand?
 - ◆ "Talk to me like I'm five years old... or your mother" until you think it's clear
- 5) What if they're on a cell phone and I can't hear them well?
 - ◆ DON'T EVER LET THEM USE A CELL-see [Leesa Barnes' post on cell phone interviews](#)

On-the-spot interviews: down and dirty tips

- 1) Who?
 - ◆ Check the program beforehand, see who's there, circle possibilities
- 2) When & Where?
 - ◆ as you visit seminars, grab a speaker right after when he's "on"
- 3) How?
 - ◆ "*Would you mind having a brief chat with me about the session you just gave/attended?*"
- 4) What? 3-5 basic questions in head--look for surprises and stories
 - ◆ Tell us who you are and why you're here.
 - ◆ How has your experience at the festival been so far?
 - ◆ Why do you come here?
 - ◆ What are you looking forward to?
 - ◆ What has your favorite experience been so far?
 - ◆ Whom have you met that you found interesting?
- 5) Also great time to remember to add a personal touch--handshake or arm,
- 6) Remember only use about 40% of what you record on the spot, so quantity will ensure quality

Book and resources

Terry Gross, [All I Did Was Ask](#)

Jessica Abel & Ira Glass, [Radio: an Illustrated Guide](#)

Ken Metzler, [Creative Interviewing: the Writer's Guide to Gathering Information and Asking Questions](#)