A 'How-to' Guide For Producing Recorded Interviews

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Abstract

Now that almost every student carries a camera in their pocket, student-created digital media items can be used to supplement curriculum material and as assessment. Although students can easily record interviews, events, and activities on their phones, they often require support to help them produce material of acceptable quality. This paper includes the support materials we give to students when we asked them to record and then present interviews with science graduates. The support materials incorporate practical tips and appropriate internet resources for planning and recording an audio or audio-visual interview. Taken together, these support materials help students produce reasonable quality media resources, using a phone or tablet as the recording device, on their first attempt.

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INTRODUCTION

The follow guide introduces key processes involved when producing professional-standard audio/visual material; we have placed the focus on recording one-on-one interviews, but the tips are applicable for other types of media production. We have also included websites links that we encourage students to use.

Many of the sites refer to professional equipment, such as tripods and lighting, but the principles highlighted in this support material still apply even if professional equipment is not available. We have also included some tips for creating quality audio/visual material with personal electronic devices, such as smartphones or tablets.

The remainder of this support material is written as a guide to students. The goal is to give students a useful practical guide to developing and producing a good quality piece of media.

A "HOW TO" GUIDE FOR STUDENTS WHO ARE CONDUCING AND RECORDING INTERVIEWS

This guide will help you design, conduct, record, and produce an interview as a digital media item. Although the information provided here focuses on the process of conducting and recording a one-on-one interview, the principles addressed will also be suitable for other types of filming and media production. The guide includes tips, tricks, and internet resources to help you produce your item in the minimum amount of time. You can use a wide variety of equipment for the media production

work - from your cell phone to professionally-supplied equipment; the principles in this guide are the same, regardless of the equipment you use.

Both the tips and the resource lists were developed in association with a science communicator who is an experienced media producer. The guide also includes and explains some language that media professionals use when they describe the interview process; these will be helpful if you work with journalists or professional science communicators during your project.

PREPARING FOR YOUR INTERVIEW

Before you start any recording or interviewing, you should have a clear idea of what you want your final product to look or sound like. To get started with your plan, consider the major elements of an audio/visual interview:

- Introduction and a sign-off
- Body containing the actual interview
- Context audio and footage
- Narration
- Extra audio and/or music

PRE-WORK

Before you go to your interview location to film you will need to have a plan in place for what you will do for, and with, each of the major elements listed above. If possible, call the interviewee before you go and discuss the interview, outline

what you would like to take away from the session, and ask for their ideas and input as well. Talk with them about the time available for the interview and the audience for which you are producing the interview. The interviewee is likely to have questions for you about the interview and it is professional practice for you answer these before the interview day. The interviewee will probably also have suggestions about interesting things you can film or record while you are on location - after all, they probably understand their context better than you do. It is unlikely you will get a second chance to visit or interview the interviewee, so make sure your first visit counts!

Filming in the interviewee's office is usually safe and easy - if you want to film somewhere more unusual, such as a laboratory or experimental field site, you may strike a more complex set of demands around location access and operational health and safety requirements. JISC Digital Media have produced a video (1) that helps you consider the issues you might face if you choose to film in a non-office environment.

BUILDING A RUN SHEET

You should use a Run Sheet to plan what the final product will look and sound like before you start shooting. A Run Sheet should contain:

- the order of different elements
- the timing of each element (this may change once you have recorded and edited your interview)
- narration script (you can change some details of this later)
- transitions between segments, if applicable
- a plan for the different ambient sounds and cutaway footage you want to record, including location, requirement for the interviewee in this footage, and how long you want to spend recording these elements.

BUILDING YOUR INTERVIEW

Once you have an idea of how you want your interview to look and sound, you will need to supply the components. This section gives you a "how to" for each component.

THE INTRODUCTION

The Introduction is a short piece of speech, audio, graphics, or "vision" that sets the scene for the audience; in the finished product, it should be no more than 30 seconds. Note, "vision" is the technical term that journalists use to describe images.

The Introduction should give a sense of: (i) who you are interviewing ("talent" is the term journalists use to describe their interviewee); (ii) the location of your interview; and (iii) what the interview is about.

Before you go to the interview location, plan what you need to record or film for your introduction while you are there. You might need background noise and shots of the environment. Obviously, you will need some information about your interviewee in your introduction, so record the interviewee introducing themselves and explaining their work. You do not have to include this material in the final video, but it will give you valuable information for your introductory narration. Also, be sure to get the spelling and pronunciation of the information correct before you leave.

THE SCRIPTED NARRATION

If you are including any narration in your piece, it is important to write your script for listening (or "for the ear" as journalists say), rather than as you would for a purely written communication. Write the introduction and then read it aloud. How does it sound? How easy was it to say? Chances are if you have created text for written rather than oral communication, it will sound unnatural, even to you. You can make your content sound better by:

- using a conversational tone
- writing short sentences and avoiding a lot of commas
- using simple terminology, rather than very formal wording
- writing in the active voice
- using contractions, again so the tone is less formal
- describing or referring to things using simple language

CONTEXT MATERIAL

We already said you might need some context material for your introduction, but remember you may also need it for other parts of your production. Do not forget to allot time for collecting context material, either before or after the interview. This extra audio and video will help add interest to your interview, and as you will see, it can be useful during editing.

AMBIENT NOISE

Collect some ambient noise, or the noise you hear normally at the location of your interview - even if you are filming in an empty office, there are probably some interesting sounds available. MediaCollege.com provides more information on ambient audio (2).

You might like to add some ambient noise to the background of your introductory narration, or include some at the end of your piece. Ambient noise is a good way to fade into and out of an interview.

CUTAWAY SHOTS

While it is acceptable to shoot an interviewee in the frame for the entire duration, using some related context shots of the interviewee or the location of your interview will create interest and help you during the editing phase.

This footage, called "cutaway shots," can include the interviewee working, the location of the interview, or anything else that might help set the scene. This video by Watchmaps provides advice on shooting cutaways (3); you might be surprised how much you need to produce a final edited version of your interview.

BACKGROUND MUSIC AND SHORT AUDIO SEGMENTS

As an alternative to ambient noise, you might consider using some background music for different parts of your finished piece (like the introduction, the sign-off, or transitions between different segments). Podcasts and radio shows have specific terminology for the different types of short audio segments they use; sweepers, stingers, bumpers, and drops (4).

Next time you listen to your favorite podcast, pay attention to the background audio. You might notice the presenter uses music under their introductory narration, and you might also notice shorter bursts of sound at the start of a new section.

Aim for background audio-only sections to be less than 10 seconds. If you are using music under some narration, allow a couple of seconds of music overhang at the start and end of your speech. Experiment with different durations for your music track - you might be surprised how short you need to make them, and how annoying it can sound when the music track goes on for too long.

Do not include background music behind the entire interview; it will distract from what your interviewee has to say. This advice applies to any sounds used underneath narration; make sure you can hear the voice clearly and the music does not compete for the audience's attention.

The music you choose should be appropriate for the setting and the tone of the interview, and it should not be distracting. Generally, this means avoiding tracks with vocals and a complex melody or structure. Choose something with a repeating beat or melody that fades nicely into the background. This video from Wistia (5) provides more detail on choosing background music, and some links to example tracks you might like to use.

AVOIDING COPYRIGHT PROBLEMS

You need to be a bit careful about the material you use in your videos and audio files. Unless you want to worry about royalty fees, it is best to use material with a Creative Commons (CC) license. The CCSearch website (6) allows you to find items with a CC license. Often you still need to attribute CC items to their author; just check the permissions on each file or item you would like to use. Of course, you can also avoid copyright issues by using original music or art work you have created. If you use your own music or art work, make sure you credit yourself so you have copyright control over the items. You can get a creative commons license that reflects the level of control you want to exert at http://creativecommons.org.

THE SIGN-OFF

A sign-off provides closure and structure for your interview. This does not need to be more than five seconds, and it can even be incorporated into your interview when you thank the interviewee for their time.

The tone of your sign-off is important. Make sure you sound confident, friendly, and final! If you are unsure what to say in your sign-off, watch or listen to some experienced journalists as they conduct one-on-one interviews, then copy their style.

RECORDING YOUR INTERVIEW

When you are filming, a great way to get your interview looking great is to follow the BE.SAFE system (7). BE.SAFE is an acronym for Background, Eyeline, Support, Audio, Framing, and Exposure. Watch the BE.SAFE video to find out about the essentials of getting the right background, framing the shot, getting a good camera angle, and lighting your subject.

Another great resource is the Rob and Jonas' Filmmaking Tips series, for a representative video see (8). This series shows you examples of good and bad practice, and Rob and Jonas show you how to make good videos on a phone or Go-Pro.

AUDIO

Audio is the most important part of your recording to get right, especially if you are producing an audio-only interview. In this case, the look of the interview location will not matter, but the background noises will definitely impact the quality of your final product. The same applies for video footage.

If possible, visit the location of your interview before the scheduled day at the same time the interview will take place. Note any sounds in the space, especially those that might be distracting on the final track.

Record yourself speaking in this space, or bring a friend to stand in for your interviewee. Consider where you will position yourself and the interviewee during the interview. Practice having a conversation and listen back to your recording. If something does not sound right - there is an echo, annoying background noise, or the interviewee is too quiet or loud - change your set up.

Do not panic if you don't get a chance to test your audio recording before the interview. Ask your interviewee if you can spend 5-10 minutes with them before the interview, making sure the sound quality is right. This might also give them a chance to feel comfortable with being recorded and allow them to sound more natural in the final product.

Ideally you should use a small lapel microphone for your interviewee, and you can plug the cord from this directly into the audio jack of your recording device. If possible, also use a separate device out of frame to record the audio of the interview. If nothing else, this will provide you with a back-up if anything happens to your original footage. If you must, you can synchronize this external audio with the vision from your interview using editing software. You can also use this audio for transcription.

VIDEO

This section covers different aspects of shooting quality video footage - or "getting the shot" - for an interview. The tips apply whether or not you have professional equipment, and tips for shooting with a personal electronic device (phone or tablet) are also included throughout.

Much of the following information draws on the resources on Media College.com (9) a website with tips about interviewing, shooting video, and recording audio.

SETTING THE SCENE: BACKGROUND AND LIGHTING

The background, like the location of your interview, should be relevant to your interviewee and the interview. You might like to ask your interviewee if you can change the background by moving objects into or out of the interview space (journalists call this "dressing" the space). Check there is nothing in the background that distracts from them, and that they clearly stand out against the background. Copperwheat Films provides a helpful resource video about backgrounds (10).

Use natural lighting when possible, as this is also the best type of light for a phone or tablet. Make sure the light is in front, and shining onto, your interviewee. Do not film with the strongest light behind your interviewee, because their face will be obscured by the contrasting halo of light around their head. Avoid very harsh light, such as direct sunlight. Be mindful of

the changes in light over time. Rob and Jonas' Filmmaking tips (8) also discusses lighting, and shows you some examples of good and bad practice.

Finally, make sure there is nothing in the frame would detract from what your interviewee is saying - this means no funny, inappropriate, or copyrighted content in the background and nothing that makes the interviewee look silly (like a shadow, a stray leaf sticking out from behind them). Check this again once you have positioned them in the frame.

GETTING THE SHOT: POSITIONING YOUR TALENT

The best way to position your interviewee when they are the only one in the shot is:

- at eye-line with the camera
- off-center in the frame (according to the Rule of Thirds, more details below)
- showing their whole face
- ensuring they are looking off to the side of the camera, not into it
- with some or all of the talent's torso in the shot, avoiding extreme close-ups
- with a little space above their head.

When using a phone or tablet, turn it so you are filming in landscape - never in portrait! If you want to get a closer shot of your talent, physically move yourself closer to them, as the zoom on your device will distort the image.

If you want to change something about the shot, stop the interview and make an adjustment - do not move the camera when the interviewee is speaking.

Keeping your shot steady is also important, so if you don't have a tripod, hold your device with both hands and brace your arms closely against yourself. This technique might be worth practicing with a friend.

THE RULE OF THIRDS

Figure 1 shows a "frame", divided into thirds lengthwise and vertically. The blue rectangle provides some idea of where the eye-line of the talent should be. The purple dots show places where the dividing lines intersect; these are good places to locate your interviewee's face. Avoid putting your talent directly in the center of the shot. For more on how the Rule of
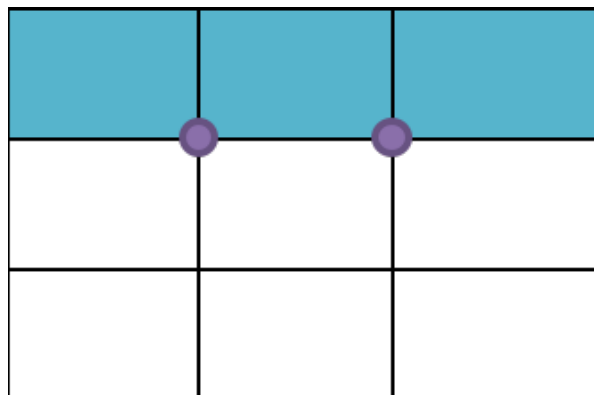
Thirds can improve your film shots go to these materials from Browne (11) and MediaCollege (12).

YOUR CONTRIBUTION AS AN INTERVIEWER

It is important for you, as an interviewer, to be QUIET. Even if you are excited about the content, you know a lot about the subject, or you just want to be part of the conversation, resist the temptation to speak during the time your interviewee is speaking. Instead, ask an open question, then allow your interviewee to answer while you listen appreciatively. Copperwheat Films (10) provides some helpful tips about how to encourage your interviewee to speak by remaining silent; the same video also gives tips on how to ask open questions and how to acknowledge what your interviewee is saying without speaking.

Consider whether you would like to include shots of yourself, the interviewer, in the final edited product. This decision can be a bit complex, and you will need a second person to come with you if you attempt to include yourself in the shot. MediaCollege provides useful information about editing (13), but consider the feasibility of each style - particularly the section on "Noddies".

EDITING YOUR INTERVIEW

You can use any one of a variety of programs to edit your video - choose the one you like best. It may be simplest (and cheapest) to use the editing software that comes with your computer (e.g., iMovie for Mac or Movie Maker for Windows). You can get additional information about purchasing software from reputable online sources (e.g., 14, 15), and there are several free, powerful, multi-platform programs available (16).

As you edit, remember audiences usually have a short attention span, and a low tolerance for anything not directly related to the core focus of the interview. Aim to make your entire final interview product between 3 and 5 minutes long (and no more than this!).

Present your interviewee and yourself professionally in the edited interview, using your cutaway shots to splice out irrelevant sections of the interview, or moments where your interviewee stops speaking (e.g., they cough) or loses their train of thought. Offer your interviewee the opportunity to view the final version before you release it to a public forum.

CONCLUSION

Planning and creating an interview is both challenging and exciting. As a new interview producer you do not have to be perfect, but it is important to be professional, polite, and respectful of your interviewee's time and experience. If your interviewee is a working scientist, they might end up being your employer one day, and an interview is an ideal opportunity to impress them with your preparedness, your interest in them, and your wish to showcase their work.

SCIENTIFIC TEACHING THEMES

ACTIVE LEARNING

This guide was used to help students interview a working scientist of their choosing as part of a course that addressed employability. We asked students to complete their interview alone (but other academics may easily use this activity for a student pair or trio). We do not recommend asking more than three students to work together on an interview, as larger

groups increase the possibility of conflict and disorganization around writing, interview content, and editing.

Students were directed to:

- Draw a mind map of their professional network and choose, from that network, a working science graduate as an interviewee (done in class).
- Set up the interview at an agreed time and place (warn this students that this can take a lot of time to organize, so they need to plan in advance).
- Focus the interview on the career pathways of their interviewees, and on the work-relevant skills the interviewees had gained from their science degree (we spent class time workshopping questions that students wanted to ask).
- Produce the interview (in audio or visual form) and put it in a common online facility so the other students could see their work (grading was pass/fail).
- Write a reflection on how the discussion with the interviewee affected their own understanding of employability (and submit this reflection for high pass/pass/fail assessment).

Producing an interview and an associated reflection requires students to engage with multiple processes that constitute active learning as defined by Meyers and Jones (17) (e.g., talking, listening, writing, reading, and reflecting). The students also need to consider their understanding of science (and science training) in a new context. The interview and the reflection require students to transform their sense of self from "student" to "professional in training."

We hoped that students would make associations between the material and skills they had already mastered in their science degree and their emerging status as a work-capable person. In many cases their reflection assignment reflected this transition.

ASSESSMENT

We did not assess the actual quality of the interview item students made (other than a pass/fail for submitting the item); since this activity was implemented in a science course, we and the students did not think it was appropriate to assess the students' ability to produce a piece of media. To help students conduct a good interview we used class time to workshop the questions students wanted to ask. Pre-feedback can also be provided by practicing or modeling interview technique in the classroom before the students complete their interview.

We assessed students' written and spoken reflection on what they learned from the process of finding and interviewing a science graduate; we used a High Pass/Pass/Fail rubric adapted from the work of Barbara Glesner Fines (18). The adapted rubric is shown as Supporting File S1.

The assignments are easy to collect from students. Students can submit their interview item online through a Learning Management System or through a group facility such as YouTube, Dropbox, or Google Drive. The reflection is in a Word file, so it can be submitted online through a plagiarism detection tool linked to the university Learning Management System. It is only necessary to watch each video once to ensure the student has submitted it and this can be done in the background while the reflection is marked. Feedback can be provided by setting the rubric up online, clicking the feedback

boxes, and releasing the comments to students through their online course access.

All of our students had some kind of recording device, however we were prepared with loan recording devices and computer access from our university library, in the event that students could not obtain the hardware or software they needed.

SUPPORTING MATERIALS

- S1. Producing Recorded Interviews-Rubric

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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