Six-step Guide on How To Conduct an Effective Radio Interview

If you’ve never interviewed someone before, pick a person or subject you are somewhat familiar with, do more research, and conduct a short (3-4 minute) interview using the following steps. As you become more experienced, you will find longer and more complex interviews easier.

In general, you will want to follow this six-step pattern for your interview:

1. Research
2. The Opening
3. The Introduction
4. The Questions and Discussion
5. A Reintroduction
6. Close

1. Pre-Interview Research

While you conduct your research, write out interesting facts or tentative questions that you will use to bring the interviewee “to life”. As you will see below, these questions will not necessarily be asked in the order you write them down, and you may not ask all of them, but it is very important to create this list as you prepare for the interview.

Don’t fool yourself - the success of your interview is directly dependent upon your knowledge of the person or subject being discussed. Even if you’re on the phone with a subject, they can instantly tell if you are ill-prepared, so doing 30 minutes of research is invaluable.

The length of your interview should be dependent upon how interesting the guest and topic is. A well-prepared and great 5-minute interview is infinitely more enjoyable than a poor 10-minute interview. Unless you are conducting an interview for a spoken-word show, most interviews can be about 5 minutes long so don’t feel that you fill space.
2. Opening

An interview normally begins with a brief opening that includes the name of the show, the name of the host, the name of the guest and the interview topic. This is very important as it establishes your identity and most importantly, the reason why the listener should continue listening to the interview. **Grab their attention!**

If the interview is topic-oriented you will want to make a brief statement about the subject discussed so that the audience understands what you will be covering and why it is important. This establishes why the interview is taking place and leads to the introduction of your guest.

There should be a focal point of your conversation: a new album, an event, a band. Knowing your topic will take you a long way toward your opening remarks, which are intended to catch the audience's interest and get you off to a good start. Try to avoid just starting, "My guest today is..."

A simple example: “This Saturday at Call The Office, one of London’s hometown heroes, he beat multi-platinum artist Drake in the category for Best Rap Recording at the Junos. Last time he was in town he performed twice because demand was that high. I’m happy to have Shad today on CHRW.”

3. Introduction

Next, introduce your guest, the introduction should be used to establish the guest’s credentials - in other words, tell the audience why the guest is qualified to speak on the topic. If the person is the subject, a bit about his or her background, experiences, or unique aspects can be used to explain why the audience should find the person interesting.

Next, welcome your guest. this helps to establish a friendly atmosphere and to develop rapport but avoid overused remarks like “thanks for finding time in your busy schedule” The basic guideline is to address the guest as the average listener or viewer would.

4. The Question and Discussion

The third step is the interview itself. Often the best part of the interview occurs after you have developed a level of trust with the interviewee. **Trust is developed through the**
relationship between the interviewer and interviewee. This can simply be established by treating guests with dignity and respect. Trust begins with the first encounter, tone of voice, facial expression, and body language all contribute to its development. A knowledgeable host who uses effective listening techniques goes a long way toward establishing trust. No one wants to place faith in someone who doesn’t seem to know what he or she is talking about or isn’t interested in what the interviewee has to say.

Do not work from a list of questions as though it is a "set in stone" script. When you are reading from a 'set" of questions, it tends to be more a formal question and answer time, and loses its personable conversational tone. You want your listeners to want to listen. Use the list as a guide to help you remain engaged and on topic.

Ask open-ended questions. Simple yes or no questions can also lead to a bored audience and "dead" air spaces.

Allow the interviewee to answer the open-ended questions in their own way, being aware and intervening when or if the person goes on a tangent. A good conversational interview involves discussions, not questions that are shot at them like a projectile. If possible, try and get your guest to tell an interesting story. People love interesting stories.

If one word answers are produced, ask for elaboration. This is not being manipulative or deceptive, it's allowing for meaningful interesting and effective conversation.

Be prepared to take notes during the interview so you can ask follow-up questions.

Your goal during an interview is to entertain and inform the listeners, so keep that in mind during the interview.

5. Re-establishing

The fourth part of an effective interview is re-establishing the credentials of the guest. Unless the interview is shorter than 5 minutes, you should reintroduce the guest and topic about every 5 minutes. You might go to “I am talking with....” A good time to also re-introduce guests is after a commercial break because it provides a natural interruption in the program.
6. Close

The final part of an interview is the close. In most cases, a brief thank-you to the guest and a mention of the guest’s name and topic one more time are sufficient. You can also summarize what the guest has said, especially if the topic was complicated. A way to set the tone for the close is to ask guests if there is anything else they would like to add. If they have felt that you ignored a point that is important, this provides an opportunity for them to respond.

However, you don’t want to offer that opportunity when you have only a few seconds left...so be prepared!