VIDEO INTERVIEW BASICS

Here are some guidelines for creating a traditional video interview. These are the basic conventions. They are not rules. Feel free to deviate from them, but understand that you are making specific choices and those choices have a direct relationship with the content of the interview.

1. PICKING A GOOD LOCATION
   a. Lighting. Make sure that the location you choose to film your subject is well lit. It is best to have light that shines directly on to the subject’s face. Avoid ceiling lit rooms which cast shadows over the subject’s eyes. Face the subject towards a window.
   b. Information in the background. Be mindful of what objects or information is in the room, more precisely what info is behind the subject. (more info under COMPOSITION).
   c. Sound. Pick a location that has minimal background noise. Stay away from busy streets, radios, TV, air conditioning, heaters, noisy refrigerators, computers, or at least turn the appliances off while filming.

2. COMPOSITION
   a. Framing of your subject. Consider the camera angle and magnification of your subject. Make sure that the subject is in a medium close shot, sometimes slowly zooming into a close shot during emotional moments. Be sure not to cut the person’s head off in the frame. Conversely, do not give too much headroom. The interviewer should be next to the camera’s lens at eye-level, so that the subject’s eye-line is almost looking into the lens, making sure that the camera is level with the subject’s eyes. Obey the rule of thirds. If the subject is in the right side of the frame, have the interviewer to the left of the camera (or vice versa). This gives more room in the frame in front of the subject.
   b. Lighting. Be resourceful with your light. The key or strongest light source should be in front of the subject’s face (out of the frame) so that his/her face is illuminated. Be mindful of windows and where they are in relationship to the subject. Avoid heavy backlight in which the subject will be in silhouette.
   c. Background. Consider what objects or information is being conveyed behind the subject. In what way does it reflect the subject? (directly, metaphorically, ironically, etc.)
   d. Sound. Keep the blue tooth microphone out of the frame, but close to the subject’s mouth.

3. TECHNICAL
   a. Check equipment.
   b. Know your crew’s roles (do not mix them up).
   c. Check batteries. Bring extra.
   d. Always wear headphones while filming to make sure that the sound is good.
   e. Be cautious of filming in areas that have direct sunlight and shade within the frame. Video does a poor job of capturing such drastically different light levels. Either the sunlight spots are blown out or the shaded areas are too dark.
   f. Manual vs. Auto Focus
   g. Manual vs. Auto White Balance
4. INTERVIEW TECHNIQUES

A. Interview Preparation:

a. Ground yourself thoroughly in the subject matter you wish to discuss so you are able to frame intelligent questions. Look at a variety of sources that may help you prepare for the interview. Your research will enable you to prepare a list of topics to be discussed during the interview.

b. Prepare an outline of topics to go over during a pre-interview, taking into consideration how you may follow up in the actual interview, possibly even drafting questions. To what extent you want to give your interviewee time to prepare their answers is up to you, but you should take into account how spontaneous answers differ from those an interviewee has had a chance to think about beforehand.

c. When you make your initial contact with the interviewee, be sure to explain the significance of your project and how their interview will contribute to completing your project.

d. Ask about possible environments for the actual interview to identify a noise-free place for taping and an environment in which the interviewee will feel comfortable.

e. Suggest the general areas of questions you will be asking or give the interview questions to the interviewee well in advance of the taped interview session.

B. Shooting the Interview:

a. Before the interview, test all equipment to make sure it is working properly.

b. Explain to the interviewee that during the taping you will try to remain as quiet as possible during and directly after their answers so that you can edit this material without including your question prompts. Since people are used to verbal responses in conversation, this can seem initially cold. Ensure them that this is just to record their answers as purely as possible.

C. Interview Questioning Techniques:

a. Begin interviewing as soon as possible after arrival. Try to have everything set up and tested well in advance of your subject’s arrival.

b. Start with easy personal, non-controversial background questions (that you have acquired during the pre-interview) that will elicit expansive answers. Save controversial questions for after you have established a rapport.

c. Ask short questions; deliver only one at a time. Remember an interview is not a dialogue. Limit your own remarks to a few pleasantries than ask brief questions and remain quiet during the interviewee’s answers. Encourage the interviewee with continual and constant attentiveness; employ facial expressions, and eye contact, but try to avoid verbal responses (such as “uh-huh”). These verbal responses tend to dominate the interviewee’s responses on the tape and make editing harder for you later.

d. Avoid questions that will result in simply "yes" or "no" responses.

e. Take notes as a reminder for later questions or clarification of details. You can inform the interviewee before filming that you will be taking notes to make him/her feel comfortable.

f. Make sure that the interviewee is answering in complete sentences. It can be helpful to ask the interviewee to incorporate the question in his/her answer.
g. Be mentally structuring new questions as you are asking questions from your list.

h. Do not interrupt interviewee responses even if interviewee has strayed from your planned outline. If the information is pertinent, let them go. Some of the most rich and valuable responses arise from remaining flexible in your questioning. Probe! Always ask why and how; ask for opinions and feelings.

i. Do not fret over seemingly endless pauses; give the interviewee time to think.

j. Ask the interviewee to clarify time and place when he/she finishes answering the question; write down correct spelling of names and places after taping session is completed.

k. Concluding the interview, ask obvious wrap-up questions which will permit the interviewee to reveal anything that questioning may have missed but that he/she thinks is important to include.