

ONLINE INTERVIEWING BASICS - TECHNICAL

Introduction:

Several online projects already have experience teaching students how to conduct interviews online. The best resource I found was the PBS NEWSHOUR Student Reporting Lab's "Conducting Virtual Interviews," a part of their "Student Reporting Unit."

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1j007Ja1BKLTYisd2Z4V6C1P-muvTm3EGtZL_1hZMIh8/edit

This production guide describes remote interviews with FaceTime, Skype, or Zoom, and can be used as a blueprint for your instruction with modifications made to use Hero related content, as opposed to getting a news story. This document modifies the original content from their site for use with the MY HERO project.

First, there is an important safety note:

"In this time of responsible social distancing, reporting must be done in ways that protect student journalists, sources and society at large.

Face to face conversations outside your immediate circle should be replaced with virtual interviews. For decades news organizations have done "remotes" in separate locations with separate cameras. Think of all the YouTube and social media videos of people talking through screens."

The production guide is broken down into 7 steps, followed by Tips For Good Interviews, many of which are applicable to Hero content:

Conducting Virtual Interviews

Step 1: Choose your technology

[Zoom Meeting](#) and [Skype](#) are growing in popularity with journalists for remote interviews. Both platforms offer free versions and allow you to record the video and audio of the interview.

- Make sure you can **record both video and audio** - Check that the software is recording both. Choose 1080p recording if possible.
- Test your [internet connection](#) - Prior to your interview test your WiFi connection by recording a test video call to a friend, and watch it. If your home wifi is weak, you can see if your phone's personal hotspot (tips for [Android](#), [iPhone](#)) provides a more reliable connection.
- Using a laptop, tools like FaceTime combined with Screen Recording or QuickTime (on Macs) or Skype and **Screen Recorder (Windows) can allow even more options. Paid tools like ecamm's [Call Recorder \(\\$40\)](#) or [Callnote \(\\$9.95/mo\)](#) offer more sophisticated capabilities.**
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Step 2: (Modified for MY HERO) Pre-production

- If you are approaching someone you do not know, send an email or make a call **introducing yourself**. Explain the video story you're working on and that you would like to conduct a remote interview.
- Provide an estimated amount of **time the interview will require**, adding about ten minutes before the interview starts so you and the source can work together to get their camera, background and audio set.
- For anyone you interview, ask them to **set up** in a quiet room with natural light on their face, if possible -- and you do the same.
- Once they agree to the interview, ask them if they can **provide videos or photos** that can serve as b-roll for your story. You also might see if they can provide b-roll through Zoom or whatever recording device you're using, including having them do something in a wide shot, away from the computer.
- If interviewing someone you don't know, send them an online **release form** to sign and return before the interview, giving permission to use the footage for your project.

Step 3 (Optional/Modified): Arrange a secondary audio recording

- If your source has a laptop computer with a camera, you should ask your source to use their phone, positioned off camera but close to their face during the interview to **record a simultaneous second audio track**. They can email it to you after the interview.
- Professionals sometimes ask the person to record the interview on their own phone, looking into it, while you conduct the interview over a chat program. The video quality from their phone is better.

Step 4: Select the location for the interview and prepare the phone/laptop.

- If you and your sources are using phones, set them both horizontally so the self-facing cameras are **at eye level**, like on a few books. For a laptop, raise it slightly as well. Think about the framing of the shot.
- Encourage your source to position the window where your face will appear near the camera so it's comfortable for them to see it and be recorded.
- **Indirect natural light** is the best option. If that's unavailable, use household lighting, for example a lamp bouncing off the ceiling. Avoid light sources from directly above or below, which create weird shadows. Make sure neither of you has a bright light source, like a window, behind you which will mess up the contrast.

Step 5: Do a test call to check the tech and practice questions

- With a friend or classmate in another location, practice recording your interview, and practice the questions you'd like to ask

Step 6: Production: Conduct the interview

- If you are recording additional audio tracks, after the recording starts do a loud clap on camera to help you **sync tracks** later.
- Try to maintain direct **eye contact** with your source by looking at the camera as much as possible, gently encouraging them to look right at the camera. Pause between answers to look briefly at your notes.
- The software will be **recording you** as well, so don't type, use the mouse, speak or make any noises while the person is talking. You may nod your head encouragingly to show you're listening and liking what they're saying. Wait a few beats after they finish a sentence, which encourages them to say more. Very often this additional information, without any prompting from you, is the best.
- When the person is completely finished answering the question, ask a question that is related to what they have said. If the topic has been completely covered, pause to check your notes to see the next question that follows the flow of the conversation. You do not have to ask your questions in the order you wrote them. Follow the conversation!
- If the video connection **lags**, graciously ask your source to repeat themselves.
- **Wear headphones** during the interview to monitor audio; if you're not recording simultaneous audio, **repeat answers** when audio drops.
- When the interview is over, **check the recording** to make sure there weren't any snafus.

Step 7: Post-production: Edit the interview

- Video conferencing software exports recorded interviews with picture-in-picture options. By using screen recording software during the interview, you can export full 1080p video of the source being interviewed, as Vox does below:
- There are three example videos on the site (see link above)

Their bonus tips are specific to news reporting, but most are applicable for the MY HERO project as well.

Bonus: Tips for good interviews

STORY IS EVERYTHING

If you're interviewing someone you don't know, do your research, get to know your subject, stay the course.

THE INTERVIEW

KNOW WHO YOU ARE INTERVIEWING

- Write out potential sound bites that you need for your story. Don't stop until you get them.
- Ask the right questions. **ALWAYS** write them ahead of time. Go over them. **KNOW THEM.**
- Ask good questions—this is part of story structure because the quality of the questions you ask will help determine if you are doing a **narrated video vs first-person video**. For a narrated video, you will use the person's soundtrack with related visuals. For a first-person video, we will see the person talking with b-roll showing additional images.
- A good question is open ended.
- A good question is directly tied into the theme and angle of your story.
- A good question elicits emotion, reaction or opinion.
- Have your characters answer questions in complete sentences. Do not interrupt them!
- And ask them to repeat an answer when it needs to be "cleaned up." Again, this will impact the transcribing and editing process. It's all tied in.

SETUP

- Small talk during camera set-up to make them feel comfortable.
- Sound check - **GET THEM TO TALK** for about a minute- not just "check, check, 1, 2, 3". Ask them "What did you have for breakfast" or "tell me what you thought of the last movie you saw". Get a real conversational level out of them.
- Optional: Open them up: "Tell me who are you, and what do you do". Mid-way through the interview if it feels to be stalling ask them "Tell me who are you, and what do you do", when you feel the interview is wrapping up ask them one more time "Tell me who are you, and what do you do".
- **Listen! Ask follow up questions.**
- **Ask them to restate an answer if it goes on too long**, or seems incoherent.

TRANSCRIPTION

- **ALWAYS transcribe. Transcription is never a waste of time**
- Emotions are transcribable too. When do they cry, laugh, are scared, smile.
- Use Time Codes if available. This helps you find the footage quickly when editing.
- If possible, print out your transcription. Then cut out sound bites, making 2 piles. Good sound bites, bad sound bites.
- Start to build your story arc with your good sound bites, laying them out on a table in the order you might like to use them.
- Do not throw out your bad sound bites.
- Tape the good sound bites together in the order you've chosen. This audio is the beginning of your Edit Plan. You can add b-roll and other audio in the editing.

Here's some additional ideas about interviewing:

Interviewing Goals:

-Be curious

-Make the person you're interviewing comfortable. Remind them that the conversation is being taped and will be edited, so you won't be using everything they say. It's not a problem if they "mess up."

- Have a conversation (don't read your questions like a laundry list).

-Really listen to what the person is saying and follow up with questions based on what they said. Let the person you're interviewing explain their ideas and drive the conversation.

-Get the details, descriptions, and examples that develop the main ideas they share. Ask them to be specific.

-If a person gives very short answers, smile and say something encouraging or say "tell me more."

-AVOID leading questions (a question that encourages the person to give an answer you want) For example:

Wrong/leading: What are your thoughts on Hollywood's negative stereotyping of African Americans in movies?

Right: What kinds of ways do you see African Americans depicted in Hollywood?