



## **INTERVIEWING TECHNIQUES:**

There is an art to being a good interviewer. As a political filmmaker the person who you are working with in an interview is not just your subject, they are your partner in exploring the topic and field your documentation is about. Knowing the trauma our communities have faced with the camera, its important that we not replicate that abuse. The key to then being a good interviewer is knowing how to be transparent with your intentions pre, during, and post your shoot. Here some following tips to keep in mind.

### **Before you Shoot:**

- **Do your research.** If you are asking someone for their time to be part of your documentation know who they are and some of their background. They will respect your preparation and time, and help them be more comfortable in the process with you.
- **Prepare, Share, and Agree upon your Questions.** It is always important to have your interview questions ahead of an interview. Keep you questions short and clear. Take some time to write down at least five starter questions for your interviewee as well as an overview for what the footage will be used for (archives, a documentary project, psa, evidence, etc). These questions should be open-ended and allow for an organic conversation. In addition sending them to the person participating in the interview to change, add, or take away to the questions allows for the transparency and sharing of power in what can be an intimidating situation. Remember to have them formally sign off on these questions before the interview.
- **Ask the right kind of questions:** In an interview you want to think about your set of questions like a funnel where you go from the general questions to the specific questions. In preparing the questions you want think about the following:
- Use plain words and avoid suggesting the answers. For example "I suppose you must have had an unhappy childhood?" ask, "Can you describe your childhood?"

You will need some questions that encourage precise answers, like **"When did you campaign begin?"**

But you also need others which are open, inviting descriptions, comments, opinions: **"How did you feel about that?"** \_ **"How did your political platform grow and change?"**

### **At the Shoot**

- In setting up the shot with your interviewee just get a formal agreement about the questions you are planning to use, the format of the interview and length of the interview Transparency is the key to trust. . In addition talk once again about the purpose of the video and get written consent about the interview through a release form (you can download a sample at [www.cultureisaweapon.org/ curriculum](http://www.cultureisaweapon.org/curriculum)). If your don't have a release form available in a field shot, then get spoken consent and contact info as the first footage you take on the screen.
- Look around. You can learn a lot about someone based on the surroundings, especially if you're in a home or office. For example, a wall covered with photos of your interview subject shaking hands with prominent people tells you something about his or her ego. A neat or messy desk may tell you something, too. If you can get permission, take a photo of the person in that context.
- Most people have anxiety about how they look on camera. This comes from years of media abuse of appropriation, unnatural ideals of beauty imposed on our communities, etc. One



way to put your interviewee at ease is to name that unease but be conversational and disarming. Don't forget that after framing and composing your shot with your interviewee that you flip the screen to get their opinion and final consent.

- Remind your interviewee that this is foremost a conversation. To allow for greater flexibility in editing, it is important the interviewee **incorporates the question in their answer**.
- Don't interrupt: Don't ask too many questions. Your aim is to get them to talk, not to talk to yourself. Always wait for a pause before you ask the next question. Listen carefully and maintain good eye contact and positive body language. Examples of non-verbal positive body language can include nodding and smiling, which is much better than spoken "ers" and "ums" and "reallys" which can be harder to edit out later. Connecting gestures like these make everyone relax and allows for the interview more of a conversation.
- Be relaxed, unhurried and sympathetic. It is important to establish a polite rapport and a level of comfort for the interviewee. Some interviewees, on the other hand, need a couple minutes to become comfortable talking to a camera crew. Even though you may only have 30 minutes for an interview, you should not rush your subject. If you sense the interviewee is in a hurry, adjust your timing accordingly. Keep in mind, everyone is different. Taking the time to get to know your sources will prove valuable, especially when you need to call with follow-up questions or use them as a source for future stories. If the interview goes well, it may even go beyond the scheduled time. Give yourself plenty of time between appointments to avoid scheduling conflicts.
- Don't contradict and don't get into heated debate. Listen but don't be afraid to interrupt when you don't understand! Keep your audience in mind! One reason you are conducting this interview is to explain the topic to your audience. If your interviewee uses social justice jargon or explanations only his/her peers would understand, politely interrupt and ask for further explanation. Never be embarrassed about not knowing something.
- Don't be afraid to ask more questions, but don't jump from one subject to another too abruptly. As well as a mere descriptive retelling of events, try to explore motives and feelings with questions like "Why?" and "How did you feel?".
- Getting behind stereotype and generalisation is one of the most challenging aspects of interviewing people. But remember to be sensitive and always respect confidences.
- Finally: ask two questions at the end of the formal interview: "Who else should I speak to about this topic?" and "What have I not asked you that I should have asked you?" The first question helps you find other people who may be helpful but who may not have been on your list. The second often, but not always, brings out a point or two that will improve the article.

### **After the Shoot**

- Thank your interviewee for their time. Go over the importance of consent and review the release form. Many times people's understanding of consent can radically change from before to after an interview because they now have a tangible experience to gauge and discuss. As a result be open to the answer any questions they may now have from your process.
- If you are working on documentary, PSA, or other concrete product let them know your production timeline so that if there is a screening of final item they may be a part of the screening and have a copy of the product themselves.