

Interviewing Principles and Strategies

Reporters use different techniques to get information they need during an interview. The following strategies are used by journalists, psychologists and other professionals.

Get your interview partner relaxed!

You might start the interview sitting on the edge of the chair, then, after a few minutes, deliberately sit back in a more relaxed position in an attempt to get the subject to follow and become more relaxed.

Use the Power of Silence!

To get a response to a tough question, keep quiet and simply look your interviewee in the eye. Your source is likely to feel uncomfortable and break the silence by providing valuable information.

Listen but don't let them veer off the path!

The greatest tool for a journalist during an interview is the ability to listen. Sources respond best when a reporter listens and only interrupts to ask for clarification. Do your homework and prepare yourself for the interview, but don't show off that knowledge in an arrogant manner. Reporters who immediately challenge their sources and act like they already know everything, usually ruin their chances for a good interview.

Don't break the rules!

Most journalists follow certain standards and guidelines when interviewing their sources. Everyone's are different--some use personal ethics as a guide, others use standards set out by their media organizations.

Use your tape recorder wisely!

Tape recorders can be very useful tools during interviews but they can also be a hindrance to the openness of the source. Sometimes it takes half the interviewing time for a subject to get relaxed around a recording device, if they ever do at all. However, tape recorders can be very helpful (in court) if a subject denies a quotation attributed to him.

"I never publish what is said without the tape recorder. Without the tape recorder, people don't measure the words; they open themselves. Since my interviews are with people with power, which means responsibility, they measure their words with me and I respect that--they should measure their words. And if they say something to me while we are at lunch, or at dinner, or accompanying me to the hotel with their car, and I publish that--it's a betrayal. You've got to be very, very moral and very honest to be a journalist and to be an interviewer."

Oriana Fallaci Italian journalist