

Recording Interviews Successfully

Getting the Story · By Simon Townsend · 3 min read

Interviews: recording successfully

For all interviews, you should use a recorder. I do not use the term "tape recorder" as today most recorders do not use old-fashioned magnetic tape, but use digital recording . . . and boy, are they cheap (see below).

Remember that most interviews are done over the phone these days . . . more about that in a moment.

ALL beginner journalists are deeply disappointed after their first experience of recording an interview. Often, a large slab of the interview is unrecorded because the battery goes dead, the recorder mysteriously turns itself off (or if using old fashioned tape, the tape runs out without you noticing it). Or worse, in playback you simply can't hear the questions and answers clearly.

Even an experienced journo like me can do something silly. As recently as last July, I was interviewing a famous person and took out a cassette tape out to turn it over, only to fumble and put it back in the same way, thus recording over the first side.

Here are some important rules:

1. Buy a digital recorder - far superior to a TAPE recorder.
2. Buy a microphone with a long lead (say 4 or 5 metres) so it can stretch from the interviewee across to the recorder.
3. From Dick Smith, buy a double adaptor plug to plug into your microphone socket, so you can add a second microphone (yours).
4. Always take an extra set of spare batteries, but preferably run your recorder off 240v power.
5. Keep the recorder immediately in front of you so you can see the tape turning or the disc recording and see the "On" light or "Rec" light. If the recorder is away from you, you will not see the fact that it is not working.
6. Clip the microphones to clothing, as close to your mouth and to your interviewee's mouth as possible, for good clear sound.
7. Start by testing . . . you count to 15, your interviewee counts to 15 and then play it back to be sure.

For recording conversation, cheap digital recorders are the best. Recently I saw a Harvey Norman ad with Panasonic IC (33 hours recording time) for \$88, also the same one with a zoom microphone for \$144, a Sony Notetaker with 290hrs and a USB-direct for \$222, all rechargeable. Here are some excellent Sony ones for sale on the website newsletters@oo.com.au

Retail: \$89.00

Save: 55%

Retail: \$70.00

Save: 43%

TIP: Recording a phone conversation can be done on your message machine if it has a "2WAY-REC" button (two way recording) . . . but remember the law, and your manners, and tell your interviewee you're going to record the conversation.

Or buy an adaptor (look this up at http://www.trillium.com.au/telephone_recording_adaptors.php)

Every one of my students using a recorder for the first time, hates the result. It ALWAYS comes out wrong . . . no sound, sound too soft, can hear me but not my interviewee, batteries run flat, etc, etc. You must have TWO practice runs with a friend, just before your real interview.

What can go wrong, will go wrong.

. . . and usually it's your nervousness and lack of understanding of your own recorder.

HOW TO RECORD OVER THE PHONE: I use a silly old method of sticky-taping the mike to the earpiece (the part against your ear) of the phone. I stick the mike, facing down, over the little holes on your ear piece. As simple as that. It gets all the sound coming IN through the phone, plus MY voice going OUT. And by stickytaping it, I can still put the phone-earpiece to my ear. I don't risk the mike falling away as it might if I was merely holding it there. But one of my students, Joe, tells me: "Simon, I bought a special suction-capped microphone which sucks onto the back of a standard phone and gives perfect recording of the conversation, both my end and receiving end." So make your own choice.

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