

# Telephone manner

Getting the Story · By Simon Townsend · 1 min read

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You seem worried about phoning people to obtain information or to conduct an interview. Your life in freelance journalism will be difficult for you if you can't develop a confident, fast and productive telephone manner. Unless you are doing in-depth interviews with one person who is the whole story, then most of your work in gathering information and getting "quotes", will be done over the phone. Some freelancers develop relationships with people they constantly telephone for information or quotes, and the relationship goes on for years, but the two people never meet face-to-face. The reason it works is because there's something in it for both sides. The interviewee wants to get information out to the public (or, he likes to see his name in print, or whatever?). The freelance journalist needs the information or the fresh quotes. It also works because neither side wastes time. It's easy for me to sit back and give you the fatuous advice:

"Be confident!"

But if you're not confident right now, it will take some time to work-up that confidence. If you detect that someone you're phoning is apprehensive, then face the truth: YOU are making them apprehensive. If you sound timid and uninformed . . . your interviewee starts to feel that this interview isn't going to come out well in print. Always be informed about the topic in question, and have all your questions ready, and move fast. Don't be over-polite because it's not necessary. Your interviewee wants two things: to keep the conversation as brief and businesslike as possible, and to know that whatever quotes you end up using, they will be used accurately.

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