Video Storytelling: Audio

Maynard Institute Multimedia Editing Program, June 25-26

Mark Hiland
Senior Director of Digital Operations
The Arizona Republic/azcentral.com
3 stages of an interview

Plan: Research the topic. Identify your tour guide[s]. Prepare a list of open-ended questions. Your goal is not to leave readers with unanswered questions.

Conduct: Choose a quiet location with possibly something in the background that tells the story. Be aware the certain items in the background can distract from the interview. Have an informal conversation with subject to get them comfortable with the camera. During this conversation turn the camera on and set the audio levels on the camera. Ask open-ended questions. Pause two seconds before asking a question and after the subject’s responses. Most people can’t deal with silence in a conversation, so they’ll fill it with something. Listen to your subject to ensure you are getting the content you desire to tell the story. At the end of every interview, ask, “Is there anything I should know that we did not discuss?”

Revise: If you shoot your interviews first, you can now rework your shot list. Add those shots that correspond with the subject’s dialogue.

Notes:
Asking the right questions

The goal is to have the subject speak freely, with he/she doing most of the talking. Less is more when it comes to question asking. This is best achieved by asking open-ended questions. Open-ended questions typically begin with words such as "Why", "How" and "What", or phrases such as "Tell me about..." or “Describe for me...” Get your subject to describe and explain.

• It’s okay to ask the subject to restate the pertinent part of your question in their answer. For example, a response to the question, “Why is purple your favorite color?” might begin, “Purple is my favorite color because...”
• Keep questions short and concise
• Resist editorializing
• Eliminate leading or double-barreled questions
• Pause between answers to your questions
• Listen and respond
• Use non-verbal communication to prevent unwanted sound
• If you are not getting the response you wish, rephrase the question again. Make the question short and specifically asking for a number of answers in the response.

Open-ended questions:

Tell me about your experience of...?

Describe for me...?

Explain why you do...?

Can you give an example of...?

Why did you...?

How did you...?

What did you...?
Interview work sheet

Title: ______________________________ Date: __________________
Plot [one sentence]:

_____________________________________________________________________

Video form: ___________________ (Event, Tour, Profile, Slice of life, MOS)

Questions:_______________________ Title: ___________________________
Subject: _________________________
Phone: (W)_________(C)_________(H)________________________
Q: _____________________________________________

Questions:_______________________ Title: ___________________________
Subject: _________________________
Phone: (W)_________(C)_________(H)________________________
Q: _____________________________________________

Questions:_______________________ Title: ___________________________
Subject: _________________________
Phone: (W)_________(C)_________(H)________________________
Q: _____________________________________________

Questions:_______________________ Title: ___________________________
Subject: _________________________
Phone: (W)_________(C)_________(H)________________________
Q: _____________________________________________

Questions:_______________________ Title: ___________________________
Subject: _________________________
Phone: (W)_________(C)_________(H)________________________
Q: _____________________________________________

Questions:_______________________ Title: ___________________________
Subject: _________________________
Phone: (W)_________(C)_________(H)________________________
Q: _____________________________________________

Questions:_______________________ Title: ___________________________
Subject: _________________________
Phone: (W)_________(C)_________(H)________________________
Q: _____________________________________________

Questions:_______________________ Title: ___________________________
Subject: _________________________
Phone: (W)_________(C)_________(H)________________________
Q: _____________________________________________

Questions:_______________________ Title: ___________________________
Subject: _________________________
Phone: (W)_________(C)_________(H)________________________
Q: _____________________________________________

Questions:_______________________ Title: ___________________________
Subject: _________________________
Phone: (W)_________(C)_________(H)________________________
Q: _____________________________________________

Questions:_______________________ Title: ___________________________
Subject: _________________________
Phone: (W)_________(C)_________(H)________________________
Q: _____________________________________________

Questions:_______________________ Title: ___________________________
Subject: _________________________
Phone: (W)_________(C)_________(H)________________________
Q: _____________________________________________

Questions:_______________________ Title: ___________________________
Subject: _________________________
Phone: (W)_________(C)_________(H)________________________
Q: _____________________________________________

Questions:_______________________ Title: ___________________________
Subject: _________________________
Phone: (W)_________(C)_________(H)________________________
Q: _____________________________________________

Questions:_______________________ Title: ___________________________
Subject: _________________________
Phone: (W)_________(C)_________(H)________________________
Q: _____________________________________________

Questions:_______________________ Title: ___________________________
Subject: _________________________
Phone: (W)_________(C)_________(H)________________________
Q: _____________________________________________

Questions:_______________________ Title: ___________________________
Subject: _________________________
Phone: (W)_________(C)_________(H)________________________
Q: _____________________________________________

Questions:_______________________ Title: ___________________________
Subject: _________________________
Phone: (W)_________(C)_________(H)________________________
Q: _____________________________________________

Questions:_______________________ Title: ___________________________
Subject: _________________________
Phone: (W)_________(C)_________(H)________________________
Q: _____________________________________________

Questions:_______________________ Title: ___________________________
Subject: _________________________
Phone: (W)_________(C)_________(H)________________________
Q: _____________________________________________

Questions:_______________________ Title: ___________________________
Subject: _________________________
Phone: (W)_________(C)_________(H)________________________
Q: _____________________________________________

Questions:_______________________ Title: ___________________________
Subject: _________________________
Phone: (W)_________(C)_________(H)________________________
Q: _____________________________________________

Questions:_______________________ Title: ___________________________
Subject: _________________________
Phone: (W)_________(C)_________(H)________________________
Q: _____________________________________________

Questions:_______________________ Title: ___________________________
Subject: _________________________
Phone: (W)_________(C)_________(H)________________________
Q: _____________________________________________

Questions:_______________________ Title: ___________________________
Subject: _________________________
Phone: (W)_________(C)_________(H)________________________
Q: _____________________________________________

Questions:_______________________ Title: ___________________________
Subject: _________________________
Phone: (W)_________(C)_________(H)________________________
Q: _____________________________________________

Questions:_______________________ Title: ___________________________
Subject: _________________________
Phone: (W)_________(C)_________(H)________________________
Q: _____________________________________________
Three levels of interviewing

**Information:** Facts, names, timelines

**Description:** How things sound, feel, smell, taste, look. How things work. What happened.

**Feelings:** How the subject feels; beliefs; values; likes, dislikes
5 Steps to shooting an effective interview

S.M.A.C.K

Setting
- Find quiet location
- Remove as much background noise as possible

Microphone
- Locate microphone no more than 4 inches from subject’s mouth
- Hide microphone cord and wireless box

Audio levels
- While recording, have informal conversation with subject to set audio level and get the subject’s mind off the camera.

Composition
- Use rule of thirds
- Try to incorporate items in foreground or background to tell story
- Leave space in the frame for title graphic
- Position yourself to the left or right of the camera for subject’s POV
- Raise or lower camera to subject’s eye level
- Vary framing between responses

Keep monitoring your audio quality
- Use headphones
- Use wind screen on microphone
- If you hear a problem, stop the interview and start again

Tips:
- Informal conversation to get subject comfortable
- Position yourself left/right of the camera
- What, How, Why, Describe…questions
- Avoid double-barreled or leading questions
- Don’t ask more than one question in one breath
- Silence between answers
- Avoid distractions; give subject all your attention
- Use Non-verbal communication
- Have an agenda but listen and think
- Be creative when framing subject; this can tell the story as well
Loosening Lips -- The Art of the Interview
Eric Nadler

THE SET UP

RESEARCH: Whether you have five minutes or five days, research the person and the topic. Run the name on the Internet or check the clips. Talk to the person's cohorts. A well-researched question is a better question. A well-researched interviewer is empowered.

PLAN: Make a tactical plan. Discuss it with colleagues. Whom should you interview first? Where will you interview the person? How much time will you have? The best place is usually where the person is doing the thing you are writing about. You might calm a nervous source by taking him or her for a walk. A lunch appointment requires a person to spend at least an hour with you.

GETTING ALL THE GOODS

CHRONOLOGY: Take the subject through his or her story chronologically. You will understand the tale better, and you will spot gaps in the timetable. You'll organize the interview subject, the way you would straighten a messy file cabinet.

LIFE STORY: Get the life story, even in cases where you don't intend to use it. Even when I interview a lawyer about a case, or a bureaucrat about a government policy, I get the life story if I have time. I get useful information and ask better questions as a result.

LOGIC: Listen for logic. Respond to your instincts. If you don't understand something, gently insist on an explanation. If a person uses A-C-D logic, ask that they fill in the "B" part. The most important information may be hidden in B. Don't be afraid to ask. There are no embarrassing questions; there are only embarrassing answers.

HOW AND WHY: When a person says something important, ask the key question: "How do you know that?" It sheds light on credibility, extracts more detail and is a door opener to other sources. Follow up with: "How else do you know." Also, ask people why they do what they do, rather than just asking what they do.

HYPNOSIS: When people reach an important part of a story, slow them down and turn them into storytellers. Ask where they were standing, what they were doing, what they were wearing, what was the temperature and what were the noises around them? Then switch to the present tense, and ask questions like: What are you doing now? What is your friend saying? You and the interview subject will walk through the scene together. This technique frequently fails at first. People prefer to tell their story the easy way, in the abstract. "I drove the car off the cliff." Tell them this won't work. "I'm trying, but I just can't picture it yet. Drive me off the cliff with you." This is how you get a story, not a bunch of facts.
PAY ATTENTION TO DETAIL: Inventory the room thoroughly and in an organized fashion. Look at the walls, read the top of the desk and study the lapel pin. You'll get clues and details for your story. Make notes on what you see. Make use of what you see in the interview. Ask about it.

USE YOUR EARS: We talk too much during interviews. Let the other person do the talking.

LOOK FOR OTHER SOURCES: While at the interview, listen and watch for other sources. Meet the secretary, the assistants and the co-workers and make note of details about them. This will come in handy as you turn them into sources.

GETTING THE CONFESSION: Ask the subject for the names of people who support him or her. Then ask for the names of people who would criticize. Then ask what those critics are likely to say. This will jar loose uncomfortable information and tips. Ask whether the person has ever been disciplined or fired on the job or in school, charged with or convicted of a crime, arrested for drunken driving, sued, testified in court, etc. Since all this stuff is on a record somewhere, people are reluctant to lie about it.

DON'T FEED: Be wary of feeding information to an interview subject. In some cases it will come back to you as fact. Cops will tell you: "Don't ask whether a person saw the red car, ask what they saw."

ASK AGAIN: Sometimes it pays to interview a person two or three times on the same subject.

DRAIN THEM: People aren't aware of how much they know. You must guide them through their memory. Visualize your subject as a bucket full of information and empty it.

HONESTY: Don't pretend to be someone else and don't lie. You can certainly omit information, but the more you can reveal about the nature of your story, the more comfortable and helpful your subject will be.

BE THE DIRECTOR: A great interview feels like a conversation but moves relentlessly toward the information you need. Keep control, but do so gently.

BE FLEXIBLE: You may know what your story is about, but don't get stuck. A really great interview might be one that completely changes your story. Seek the truth, not what you believe to be the truth.

OPEN-ENDED QUESTION: Near the end of an interview, ask the person what else our readers might be interested in. Sometimes people have more than one newspaper-worthy story in them.

CHECK BACK: After the story runs, call the subject for his or her reaction. You'll get additional stories and tips this way.