**Interview Tips[[1]](#footnote--1)**

Become comfortable with your equipment. If you are, everyone else will be. Check, clean and test all your equipment before you go out. Put in fresh batteries. Make test recordings. Be over-prepared. Be a Boy Scout.

For Vox Pop, go where people are waiting. If it seems appropriate, walk right up with your sentence about what you’re doing and attach the first question to it.

Remember eye contact. Don’t let the mic be the focus — occupying the space between you and the person you’re talking to so you have to stare through it. I usually begin by holding the mic casually, as though it’s unimportant.

Don’t be afraid to ask the same thing in different ways until you get an answer you’re satisfied with. Remember you can edit the beginning and ending of two answers together, but be sure to get the ingredients. If a noise interferes with a good bit of tape, try to get it again. You can blame it on the machine, but it might be better just to wrap the conversation back to the same place so you don’t get the quality of someone repeating himself.

For repeat answers or more enthusiasm, try: ”Really??” Remember the question: “Why?”, especially following a yes or no response.

Don’t forget the preface: “Tell me about…” Let people talk. Allow silence. Don’t always jump in with questions. Often, some truth will follow a silence. Let people know they can repeat things

If you’re recording more than one person at a time, get them to gather around you and follow the conversation with your microphone. In general, it’s risky to let the interviewee hold the microphone. A musical background is very difficult to edit.

Get people up and walking– “Show me”. This can relax people and take their minds off the recording. Have the person describe where you are and what you’re doing. Refer to objects and sights around you. But try to keep the mic close to them. All this will reinforce a sense of place, action and immediacy for the listener.

If you interrupt or overlap your voice with your interviewee’s, you won’t be able to edit yourself out. This will eliminate that sense of the interviewee communicating directly with the listener; instead the listener will be an eavesdropper on your conversation. You must let your subjects know you’re with them, but use head nods, eye contact

If you do want your presence in the interview, think about perspective. Do you want to defer the primary focus to the interviewee, but have your questions legible? Then, pull the mic back half-way to yourself or speak up loudly.

Wind and handling are some of the most common recording problems. Try to get out of the wind.

Don’t use the pause button. It uses up the batteries, and if you’re listening through headphones, it can fool you into thinking you’re recording when the tape isn’t moving. Once in while, during recording, look to see that the reels are turning.

Sometimes I make a list of questions before an interview and half-memorize it. I don’t follow it during the interview, but keep it handy to check before the end to pick up anything I forgot.

Leave the machine running for stuff that seems irrelevant…it might not be. Yes, leave the recorder running. If you turn it off, they’ll say the most perfect thing you ever heard. Don’t pack up your stuff until you are gone. Allow people the chance to say things in conclusion. Ask them who else you should talk to. You might want to record them saying their names and what they do.

You can’t record too much. Remember you can always use your recorder like a dictating machine, either for on-location narration or for note-taking. Don’t forget to look as well as listen. Note specifics about what you see and feel. Immediately after an interview, make some notes about what you remember… what mattered.

1. Extract from http://transom.org/?p=7504 [↑](#footnote-ref--1)