

## **ABSW interviewing skills—27/06/2023**

*Intro:*

- *Who are you?*
- *How much interviewing do you do?*
- *How do you do the interviewing?*

### **WHY INTERVIEW?**

You need to understand what you're writing about

Or you need to check/assess your story

You need quotes, which can make the copy read better. You need different voices and perspectives.

You need colour to make a story come alive. The story about the way a project started, or what the names of the experimental machines were etc.

Or even better, a narrative. Some child has been saved, a new technology that could transform the world, an endless search has found something. These story structures write themselves.

For broadcast, you need a soundbite or you need to “engineer” the interviewee to say things in a specific, understandable way

The type of story also matters and helps to calibrate the type of interview you do.

A news interview will be quick, timely, explanatory, part of a peer review process

A feature interview might also focus on the human aspects and motivations

A broadcast interview will be largely about performance

## THE TIPS

It starts before you begin the interview...

1. Be clear what you want from your interviewee, perhaps tell them the ground you want to cover. Perhaps the premise of your article.

Arrange a specific time and don't be late (check your time zones).

2. Prepare a list of questions that you MUST have answered. Read as much as possible about your interviewee beforehand.
3. Put the interviewee at ease—ask them why they started the work; or about their field in general; or tell them what you want to get from the chat.
4. Don't become obsessed with speaking to scientists at their level—do not aim to impress them with your knowledge!
  - “But why?” Push them on what you want to know...perhaps to a place that makes them think about their research in a new way?
  - Often it's the dumb-sounding questions that elicit the best responses
5. Listen...and be prepared to pick up on surprises and change track (but do go back to your list)
6. Don't let them go off on tangents too much, steer them back gently
  - If they start speaking in dense jargon, ask them to re-explain as if they were talking to your friend in the pub (a non-scientist). Don't be afraid to say, “sorry I don't understand”.
7. Silence is your friend (especially in person). People tend to find silences uncomfortable and will want to fill it. Sometimes with something very interesting to you. You could do this at the end of a rambling answer...or a short sharp question.
8. Don't have a conversation and offer all your life experiences. Your job is to get good quotes and information from them. Stop babbling.

9. Give yourself a time limit. You won't understand everything, limit how much you collect. By collecting too much information, your writing could suffer. You might be tempted to lecture and show off all the stuff you've collected, which is one of the cardinal sins of writing.
  
10. There might be stuff you don't know you're missing. Ask them the question you're trying to tackle in your article. "Why do animals have consciousness?"
  - Ask them how they got started with their work in trying to answer this puzzle. "Why did you start working on the question of how elephants use coconuts?"