



Donald W. Reynolds
National Center
for Business Journalism

Podcast 101 Crib Sheet

Journalism doesn't change just because we are working with audio, and this is not complicated. Don't panic.



Think with your ears. In the world of audio, we need to learn to think with our ears. While a quote sometimes reads well in print, when you hear it out loud, it may not sound “pleasing to the ear”. So, ask questions that elicit a concise, direct response that you can wrap your copy around.

It's helpful to direct your interview subject to answer questions in sentence format, and in a declarative way. Obviously, you don't want to direct *what* they say, just make some suggestions on *how they say it*. This will eliminate having to trim uhs and ums from your sound later. (This can be REALLY helpful when interviewing kids or even business executives). “Mr. Smith, what was your thinking behind the budget cuts?” is much more likely to elicit a declarative answer that probably starts with “my thinking behind the budget cuts was...” than would a typical print question that may or may not even be in sentence format. “Mr. Smith, uh you, uh... made some pretty serious revisions.. was there, uh, where were, why did, you know, what sort of happened, if you...?” At this point in the “question” the print reporter is hoping that Mr. Smith will just sort of get the drift and jump in and start talking, perhaps rambling, and that there may be a quote in there somewhere. That doesn't work real well for audio. Get the person to answer you directly. Sometimes this can be a challenge for your subjects, too. So don't feel like you're putting them out. At least in the business world, these folks are getting paid to be able to put a succinct English sentence together.



Identifying your subject. I always ask a person for their name and title at the top of the interview because sometimes it works out that you can actually use that as a nice sound bite in the story. For example, ... “I’m Jim Smith and I’m the CEO of InfraRed technology” can be used to tag himself after he states his position on something. Prompt him by saying “please tell me your name and title,” rather than... “so, uh, Mr. Smith... who are you, where do you work, and what stuff do you do, and for how long, and stuff like that, you know?” That sort of “question” will invariably lead to a rambling answer that might get you the pertinent information, and would be just fine for print, but not work at all an audio story. Remember, we are thinking with and for the ear.” Having a person identify themselves this way is a handy, little audio trick that can work wonders on the ear.



Blah... blah... blah... blah... blah...

Get “Write” to the Point. Newspaper writers seem to compete to see who can write the longest sentence in the world, especially in the top graph. That doesn’t work for the human ear. You can’t sound natural reading your copy aloud if there are never any natural pauses, like, say, a period.



The writing, like the questioning, really needs to be succinct and direct. See Merv Block’s book Writing News For Broadcast: Shorter, Sharper, Stronger. I consider among the best books on broadcast writing ever written.



Sound au natural? Natural sound can serve to “take an audience to a place” that you’re reporting from. Rule of thumb: In each environment where you do an interview, just switch on your recorder and get 15-30 seconds of ambient sound of the location. No single voices (crowd noise, traffic in the street. The “scene” from which you were doing the interview). This will allow you to mix this in later if you want it, or use it as a transition, and you can mix it in later, if needed. It’s better to have it and not need it, than need it and not have it. It’s important to remember to tell your interview subjects that you need to get this room sound “in the clear” with nobody talking. Because, invariably, once the interview is over, they will begin to just make small talk with you. You must avoid this even if you have to turn away from the person. Because they will often still talk after you tell them you need them not to. Human nature.



Sound Interview Sound: There are varying schools of thought on this, but I feel it’s ok to include yourself asking a question in your story, but *only* if you’re asking a question... or making an important clarification to what they’ve said... not if you’re just saying “mmhmm”.. or “oh, I see”, just to keep the subject talking and engaged in discussion. Don’t make any noise unless you’ve planned to. Asking spontaneous questions as a follow-up is fine, but remember that what you are after here is clean sound of the person who is helping tell your story. When you are asking your questions, move the recorder near your mouth. You never know when you might want you use your question in the actual story. You are also directing the interview more commandingly and giving them “permission” to talk only when the recorder is in front of them. The last thing you want is for a newsmaker to make news when your mic isn’t in front of their mouth. It doesn’t work in the audio world.

Next, it’s ok to ask someone the same question twice. You can simply explain to the interview subject that you need to have this answer on your tape more than once and you will choose the one that either (a). makes their case better, or (b). sounds better in the story. Typically, your subjects are happy to have you do this. What you don’t want to do, obviously, is to try to get them to *change* their answer, and you can make that clear. Remember, *you* are *directing* the interview, and the sound therein.



To hear some good news-related audio, here are a few Web sites that I frequent. Obviously, there are many others.

KJZZ.org

NPR.org

Transom.org

Audible.com

BBCNews.com

Handout provided by Mark Moran, News Director, KJZZ, Phoenix
Contact Mark at <mailto:mmoran@kjzz.org>