



Show Notes

Season 4, Episode 1:

Why interviewing is an essential skill - and our top tips

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What's in this episode?

Hosts Rachel Smith from [Rachel's List](#) and journalist and content creator [Lynne Testoni](#) talk interviewing – why it's an important skill and their top tips and tricks

Why do interviews?

- Getting a personal angle on a subject helps to keep it fresh and up to date
- It makes it original and Google loves original content
- It's an important skill that seems in danger of being lost (by newbie journos)
- Interviewing may not be required for some content you write but it does make it meatier and more authoritative – AND showing a client you can find great people to interview can make you more valuable to them. You should charge more for stories requiring interviews too.

Interviewing regular people

- A lot of people you might approach for case studies / real life stories are nervous about being interviewed so spend some time creating a rapport
- Ask easy-to-answer questions such as how to spell their names, what title they'd like, whether they prefer Rob or Robert, the weather (it works!)
- Share a bit of personal info as well, such as where you're based or stuff about your kids to put them at ease and establish a connection
- Sometimes you have to spend the bulk of the interview listening to someone's story – stuff you can't use – and you get the gold right at the end.

Interviewing experts

- Always check what types of experts are allowed. Some mags, digital outlets and clients have strict rules about the types of experts you can interview and if you get it wrong it'll waste your time and the expert's time (for eg, some health mags only want you to interview dietitians as opposed to nutritionists, or registered psychologists rather than counsellors).
- Finding experts in academic circles is easy with [expertguide.com.au](#)
- [Sourcebottle.com.au](#) can be another way to find experts in all industries

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- Be super professional and mindful of an expert's time. Be on time!
- Always send a meeting request to confirm the interview time and date
- If it's a technical subject and they may have to dig out research papers or stats, send questions beforehand
- Do research beforehand so you can sound like you know the subject a little
- If you don't know anything, confess that right away and ask them to explain things in layman's terms. Make notes for any tricky terms to clarify with them.

Interviewing celebrities

- Can be tricky. Prep is essential and the ability to think on your feet
- Celebs are tightly managed so being able to negotiate / create a rapport with the PR or their manager can be as essential as creating it with the celeb
- Celebs often talk in simple sound bites about their latest project, making all their interviews sound the same – so try to come up with left-of-field questions, interesting trivia, something that makes them laugh or surprises them to get those nuggets of gold no one else has managed to get
- Asking about their background or childhood can work if you need personal stuff rather than going in hard on stuff they may be cagey about like r'ships

Asking the right questions

- Never start a question with Why. It makes people immediately defensive and only should be used in hostile / hard news situations
- Ask open rather than 'closed' questions. Closed questions usually require a yes/no answer and are good for checking simple facts or getting a subject talking and comfortable, but they won't give you that extra unexpected gem that makes a good story. Our 10 favourite 'open questions' are:
 1. What did/do you love about (the subject)
 2. What is the most important thing our readers need to know?
 3. What surprised you about the project?
 4. Tell me more about....
 5. Is there a reason you....
 6. Can you share a bit more about how it works / why you did that?
 7. Is there anything you wish you'd done differently...
 8. What's the future for your industry?
 9. What's next / what's new for you workwise?
 10. Is there something else you'd like to mention that I haven't ask you?

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Finding out more about interviewing

Check out these blog posts on Rachel's List:

- <https://www.rachelslist.com.au/blog/my-new-efficient-interviewing-transcribing-system/>
- <https://www.rachelslist.com.au/blog/ask-us-wednesday-how-many-journos-out-there-still-rely-on-shorthand-or-conduct-interviews-without-a-recording-device/>
- <https://www.rachelslist.com.au/blog/11-interviewing-mistakes-even-veteran-journos-make/>
- <https://www.rachelslist.com.au/blog/do-you-have-a-love-hate-relationship-with-interviewing/>

And keep an eye out for our interviewing masterclass, which is coming up soon! Find out more about all our masterclasses [here](#).

That's it for this episode. Hope you've found these show notes useful.

Cheers, Rachel and Lynne