UNIT 11: INTERVIEWING FOR RADIO

UNIT STRUCTURE

11.1 Learning Objectives

11.2 Introduction

11.3 Interviewing (art of interviewing, types, sound bytes etc)

11.4 Types of Radio Interview

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11.7 Important aspects at the Time of Radio Interview

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11.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to :

- learn the use of interview as a tool for reporting.
- prepare for a radio interview.
- conduct a radio interview.

11.2 INTRODUCTION

In the last three units we have discussed in detail about Radio news and its basic features, how to do reporting for radio, and writing for the radio news.

But you may not be clear about different aspects of radio interview. Interview plays a great role in radio programme production. It is an exchange between a journalist or presenter and a source of information. It requires good preparation, a knowledge of techniques and heightened communication skills.

So, let us begin by learning about the radio interview, its types, approaches, how to prepare for a radio interview and how to conduct it.

11.3 RADIO INTERVIEW

The aim of an interview is to provide, in the interviewee's own words, facts, reasons or opinions on a particular topic so that the listener can form a conclusion as to the validity of what she/he is saying. It follows from this definition that the opinions of the interviewer are not to be counted here and that he should not get drawn into answering the question himself/herself. Within the present definition, it is the interviewee who must come through in the programme and not the interviewer.

The interview is a spontaneous event. Spontaneity also adds to credibility. A rehearsed interview will not only sound 'staged' but also 'fixed', if not 'planted.' For this reason, though the topic may be discussed beforehand, the actual questions should not be provided in advance. The interviewer acts on behalf of the listener in that she/he asks the interviewee what the listeners want to know. Not just that, but also what the listener would ask if he/she knew as much about the interviewee as the interviewer knows. In this sense, most significantly, the interviewer is several steps ahead of the listener. The interview is an ideal opportunity to provide not only what the listener wants to know but also what the listener needs to know.

11.4 TYPES OF RADIO INTERVIEW

Generally, there are *three* types of interviews- **Spot Interviews, Field Interviews** and **Studio Interviews, Phone in/ Teleconferencing mode.**

Spot interviews are brief and usually limited in scope. For example, who will you vote for? Are you happy with the new tax policies? etc. The interviewer may put such questions to some people on the spot for a spontaneous answer.

Field interviews can be either long or brief. You may interview a farmer in his farm; a pilot in the airport or a sailor on the ship.

Studio interviews are usually formal. Again, this may either be long or short. Studio interviews may be live or recorded and it may be recorded or live broadcast through phone-in or teleconferencing mode.

11.5 APPROACHES TO RADIO INTERVIEWS

For the sake of simplicity, **three approaches** to interviews can be identified, although any one situation may involve all three categories to a greater or lesser extent. These are the **informational, interpretative** and **emotional interviews.** Again a radio interview may be investigative in nature.

Obviously the function of the **informational interview** is to provide information to the listener. The sequence in which this is done becomes important if the details are to remain clear. This type of an interview demands thorough preparation. There should be considerable research and discussion done about what should be included or excluded. Facts and statistics should be checked and cross-checked. If, for instance, one plans to produce an interview on global warming, one must look thoroughly into the phenomenon, causes, effects and consequences of global warming. The objective here is to be informative and descriptive, not prescriptive or interpretative. For example:

Can you explain the process of global warming?

Can you tell us the procedure for selecting players for the upcoming India-Australia test series?

The **interpretative interview** has the interviewer supplying the facts and asking the interviewee to either comment on them or explain them. The aim is to expose his or her reasoning and allow the listener to make a judgment on his/her sense of values or priorities. Replies to questions will almost certainly contain statements in justification of (or allegations against) a particular course of action and the questions which themselves can also be questioned. An example of this particular kind of interview would be, for instance, an education minister giving his reasons for an already formulated or proposed education policy. The essential point is that, the interviewer is

not asking for facts of the matter; these will generally be known; rather, he is seeking the interviewee's reactions to the facts. For example:

Why do you say that the Opposition party is communal?

How do you respond to the charge that your education policy is elitist?

A good interviewer will always know that a situation of this kind is generally reactive and would therefore, never rehearse it in detail.

The aim of the **emotional interview** is to give an insight into the interviewee's mind so that the listener may understand what is involved in human terms. Specific examples would be the feeling of relatives of say, victims of a train accident. Or the feeling of achievement for an athlete who has won an Olympic gold medal. In these situations, it is the strength of the feelings concerned, and not rationality, that is important. For example: consider this question:

Its been a year since your wife died. What difference has her absence made to you?

You have finally won the National Award. How does it feel?

Needless to say, emotional interviews need sensitive handling. It is very easy to slip into sensational voyeurism when one is handling human emotions. An interviewer must consciously stop himself from exploiting vulnerable situations and intruding into private grief. Interviewers should avoid questions like *"How does it feel to have all your children killed?"*



Voyeurism: Enjoying to see the pain or distress of others

11.6 PREPARATIONS BEFORE A RADIO INTERVIEW

It is essential for the interviewer to know what he/she is trying to achieve. Is it the objective of the interview to establish facts or discuss reasons? What are the main points that need to be covered? What are the established arguments in this case? What runs counter to it? Is there anything else I need to know? If the interviewer is not the producer he/she must have a thorough briefing with the producer and the research team. Even if the interviewer is working with the research team he/she should be absolutely thorough with the background material. There should be no

confusion with names, dates, figures or facts. Even a minor error can sound embarrassing. For example: note these questions.

"Why did you choose to hold the conference in 1977?"

"Well, actually we held it in 1973."

"As chancellor of the university, how do you see the future?"

"No, I am the chairman…."

In the above cases the interviewer has not done the home work properly before the interview and hence such errors and the resultant embarrassment.

At this point, it makes no difference to the validity of the question but a lack of care undermines the interviewers credibility in the eyes of the interviewee and more importantly, in the ears of the listeners. Once the basic information is gathered, the interviewer should concentrate on structuring out the questions. There is no ideal way of structuring the questions nor is there any need to have a rigid structure to follow.

To summarize, an interviewer's normal starting point will be:

- To obtain sufficient briefing and background information on the subject.
- To have detailed knowledge about what the interview should be able to achieve.
- To know what the key questions are.

The next stage, after the preparatory work is to discuss the interview with the interviewee. The first few minutes are crucial as it determines how the interview will proceed. The interviewer can never fully know how the interviewee will respond. She/he may be brisk and professional, sympathetic, friendly or inhibited.

Unless the situation is exceptional, the interviewer must be reconciled to the fact that it is not he/ she who is required to talk. The interviewer, therefore, must be careful about not getting drawn into discussion or adopting a judgmental attitude. Hostility is not just bad manners; it is bad strategy. Because the interviewee will either be equally rude or just shut up! The interviewer's main job at this point is to clarify what the interview is all

about and to strike a rapport that would produce appropriate information in a logical sequence. The interviewer should gain the confidence of the interviewee and at the same time be in control of the situation. It is common practice to say beforehand what the first question is going to be. This can help avoid a complete 'freeze' once the tape starts recording. Specialised and technical jargons should always be avoided. Though the interviewee may be a specialist, the listeners are not. Short and articulate introductions are always preferable to long and rambling ones.

Conclusions need careful handling. The last note is probably what the listeners will carry home. It may be useful to precede the last question with signals to the interviewee about time running out. This could be indicated with questions such as;

"Briefly, why……..?"

"In a word, how…..?"

"At its simplest, what……?"

Finally a last word of advice. The word 'finally' should be used only once!

A good interview depends on more than just a list of questions.

11.7 IMPORTANT ASPECTS AT THE TIME OF A RADIO INTERVIEW

Following are the important aspects that you have to keep in mind at the time of an interview

- **Make your approach polite and respectful**

  Explain what you're doing. Be confident. Assume your subject will want to talk to you. The way people respond depends on how you approach them. The trick is to make people realize that your project is both fun and serious. Also let people know that everything can – and will – be edited.

- **Make the interview situation comfortable before you start**

  Move chairs around, get close so you don't have to reach. For example: Sit at the corner of a table, not across, so you can hold the microphone close and your arm won't grow weak.

- **Record interviews in the quietest place possible :** Be careful of TVs, stereos, traffic noise, wind, anything that will be distracting from the interview. Even refrigerators can make an annoying sound that you might not notice until you get home and listen to the tape. Sometimes you want the sound of the environment. But it's best to gather that separately, and record all the important interviews in a quiet place. Anytime you are in a loud room or noisy environment , remember to collect a few minutes of that sound on its own – what is called a "sound bed" or ambience. If you have to record an interview in a loud place, it can help to bring the microphone even closer (2-3 inches) to the speaker's mouth.
- **Keep the microphone close :** It bears repeating here: Just as when you are recording yourself, the most important thing is to keep the microphone close to the speaker's mouth (5-6 inches). If you want to record your questions too, you'll have to move the microphone back and forth.
- **Always hold the microphone :** Don't let the interviewee take the microphone. It is better if you keep control of the equipment.
- **Put people at ease :** Talk about the weather. Joke about the microphone. It is a good idea to begin recording a few minutes before you actually start the interview. That helps you avoid the uncomfortably dramatic moment: "Okay, now we will begin recording." Just chat about anything while you begin rolling tape. Before they realize it, you've started the interview.
- **Maintain eye contact :** Keep the microphone below the line of sight. Talk to people just as you would normally do.
- **In groups, don't let everyone talk at once :** If you are interviewing a few people at a time, have them gather around close to the microphone. Try to focus on one or two people. Less is better. You're better off zeroing in on the characters you think are the best. Also, get people to identify themselves on tape.

- **Watch out for uh-huhs :** Be aware of natural conversational responses like 'uh-huhs' or laughter. Try to use quiet responses: a concerned nod, questioning eyes, the silent laugh.
- **Don't be afraid of pauses and silences :** Resist the temptation to jump in. Let the person think. Often the best comments come after a short, uncomfortable silence when the person you are interviewing feels the need to fill the void and add something better.
- **Let people talk in full sentences :** Avoid questions that can be answered with a simple yes or no. Instead of, "Are you a doctor?" ask, "Tell me how you became a doctor." Remember that you want people to tell you stories.
- **Get people to 'do' things :** In addition to the sit-down interview, have people show you around;
  record a tour of their house, their photo album or their car engine. It's more fun to get people moving around and talking about what they're doing, rather than just sitting in a chair. It helps to relax people before and during an interview. It's also a way to get good tape.
- **Listening is the key :** A good interview is like a conversation. Prepare questions, but don't just follow a list. The most important thing is to listen and have your questions come naturally. If your questions are rehearsed and hollow, the answers will be too. If you are curious and your questions are spontaneous and honest, you will get a good interview.
- **Interviewing is a two-way street :** Conducting a good interview depends, in part, on asking the right questions. But it is also important to establish a relationship with the person you are interviewing. Sometimes it is appropriate to share some information about yourself in an interview. Remember that it is a conversation. What is more, for it to be an honest conversation, people must feel that you care about what they say, and will honor and respect their words and stories.
- **The foolproof question :** Here is one simple question that always works*: "How do you see things differently since (blank) happened?"*
  If you're talking to your mailman about the time he was chased for 2 blocks by a neighborhood dog, ask how he feels every time he goes by that house.

- **Take notes :** Remember specific details. Take notes immediately after the interview, while it is still fresh in your mind. You can also use the tape recorder like a dictating machine.
- **Relax and forget about the microphone :** One thing that's always amazing: In the beginning of an interview people are usually stiff and self-conscious, but after a while, they forget all about the tape recorder and start to be themselves.
- **The last secret to a great interview :** There is one simple rule for getting people to talk openly and honestly: You have to be genuinely curious about the world around you.
- **Don't be over smart :** A radio interviewer should not be over-smart.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q.1 What do you mean by informational, interpretative and emotional interviews?

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Q.2 Interviewing is a two-way street. Elaborate.

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ACTIVITY 11.1

1. Conduct a five minute interview with a prominent social activist of your district. You can hire a Dictaphone from the local electronic shop.
2. Take some newspaper/ magazine articles or biographies of interesting people. Read these through. Then, in three minutes, write down as many questions as you can think of based on the information you have.



11.8 LETS SUM UP

- The aim of an interview is to provide, in the interviewee's own words, facts, reasons or opinions on a particular topic so that the listener can form a conclusion as to the validity of what she/he is saying.
- The interviewer acts on behalf of the listener in that she/he asks the interviewee what the listeners want to know.
- There are three types of interviews. Spot Interviews, Field Interviews and Studio Interviews.
- Three approaches to interviews can be identified. These are : informational, interpretative and emotional interviews.
- It is essential for the interviewer to know what he/she is trying to achieve.
- There should be no confusion with names, dates, figures, or facts. Even a minor error can sound embarrassing.
- The interviewer must be careful about not getting drawn into discussion or adopting a judgmental attitude.
- The first few minutes are crucial as it determines how the interview will proceed.
- Conclusions need careful handling. The last note is probably what the listeners will carry home.
- There are some important aspects that you have to keep in mind at the time of an interview.

11.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q.No 1 : The function of the informational interview is to provide information to the listener. The sequence in which this is done becomes important if the details are to remain clear. This type of an interview demands thorough preparation. There should be considerable research and discussion done about what should be included or excluded. Facts and statistics should be checked and cross-checked. The interpretative interview has the interviewer supplying the facts and asking the interviewee to either comment on them or explain them. The aim is to expose his or her reasoning and allow the listener to make a judgment on his/her sense of values or priorities. Replies to questions will almost certainly contain statements in justification of (or allegations against) a particular course of action which should themselves also be questioned. The aim of the emotional interview is to give an insight into the interviewee's mind so that the listener may understand what is involved in human terms.

Ans to Q.No 2 : Conducting a good interview depends, in part, on asking the right questions. But it is also important to establish a relationship with the person you are interviewing. Sometimes it is appropriate to share some information about yourself in an interview. Remember that it is a conversation. What is more, for it to be an honest conversation, people must feel that you care about what they say, and will honor and respect their words and stories.

11.10 FURTHER READING

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2. Baruah, U.L This is All India Radio. Publications Division
3. Belavadi , Vasuki (2007) Video Production. Oxford University Press
4. Sahay, Uday (2002) Making News-Handbook of the Media in Contemporary India . Oxford University Press
5. David, J (2007) Radio Broadcasting Journalism. New Delhi : Cyber Tech Pub
6. Kundra, Shipra (2005)Basic Audio Visual Media. Anmol Publications Pvt Ltd.

11.11 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q.1 : What is the main function of informational interview?

Q.2 : What is the difference between spot intrviews and field interviews?

Q.3 : What are the important points that must be kept in mind before conducting a radio interview?