

FOUR CORE BASICS FROM SEAN BUETER, NEWS DIRECTOR & ANCHOR, WBOI/NORTHEAST INDIANA PUBLIC RADIO

1. LISTEN. This is by far the hardest and most important skill a person can learn. Often, novice interviewers come with a list of questions prepared before they start the interview and stick only to those questions. Such preparation is vital, but truly listening to what the subject is saying, then reacting and responding to them can create the best moments in any recorded interview. **Listen and adapt.**

2. CONVERSE, don't interrogate. While this isn't a hard and fast rule, it usually sounds better to react and respond as though you're having a conversation with someone, not interrogating them. This doesn't mean you don't pursue sometimes difficult lines of questioning. Nor does it mean you need to sound like you're sympathizing with the subject. But listeners more easily follow conversations that sound like regular human interactions.

3. KEEP IT SHORT: The best questions are usually the most direct. "Where did you hide the money?" "How did you feel?" "What was it like?" If background is needed to bring the audience up to speed, give them some, but then get to your question. In every interview, it's wise to think like an editor: get to the point, and use the fewest, most powerful words.

4. THINK LIKE AN AUDIENCE MEMBER. You may know what a credit default swap is, or the difference between Bach and Beethoven, or how to repair a transmission, but your audience may not. Explain, or have an interviewee explain complex ideas, because if your listener gets lost, they'll leave and may not come back.



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SOME IDEAS THAT MAY PROVE USEFUL FROM PETER DOMINOWSKI, PRESIDENT & GENERAL MANAGER, NIPR:

Interviews need a narrative structure with a beginning, middle and end.

To make the narrative flow, anticipate how you'll navigate from one idea to the next.

Once the interview begins, listen for surprises. If you've done your prep, you won't need to be thinking about your next question.

Listen for the listener and provide regular recaps of guest and topic.

Don't be a verbal listener - "uh huh" is very annoying and detracts from the story. Use non-verbal cues to indicate your attention to your guests.

You have to be able to ask difficult and challenging questions and ask the un-answered questions - the audience expects it.

Every interview should answer the central question listeners have: "Why?"

Keep questions short. They keep the conversation moving.

Ask only one question at a time.

Make sure a question is really a question. A statement with an upward inflection at the end is not a question and should be avoided. "Could you talk about that?" does not turn the statement into a question.

When a guest starts talking in the abstract, a good question to ask is "Give me an example."

A simple and effective follow-up is simply, "And then?"

Listen for cues that will carry the narrative forward, and provide your next question. For example, pick out the most interesting word in their last answer like "inevitably?"

Have quotes handy to pull out during interviews. But keep them short.

