

## Improve your interviews

PR professionals need to interview their corporate spokespeople and customers for articles, newsletters, or background information for news releases, speeches, briefing papers, and so on. In our view, there is no reason why corporate writing cannot be as good as that of top-notch journalists.

Effective interviewing is about asking the right questions, and that means doing your homework, then gently leading your interviewee on a journey to tell a good story. Brilliant interviewing is about getting your interview subject to part with private musings, personal or industry "gold nuggets," and asking poignant, but overlooked questions. This is what all great interviewers strive for.

### 5 Tips

1. Research. Google and other search engines are a great source of background information. So are corporate archives and files; everyone has a bio, so ask for it in advance. Read both positive and negative stories as background. Be careful with search engines, however, as misinformation is frequently re-published without sources. Always double-check your research with the source.

Veteran interviewers like James Lipton spend 80 to 100 hours getting ready for an interview on the Actors Studio program. Charlie Rose, on the other hand, is that rare breed who is an information sponge and produces his own show.

2. Failing any background available on your subject, try to arrange an old-fashioned interview face-to-face interview with your subject. Look around their office for interesting or unusual objects, photos, and memorabilia. Probe. If all else fails, the question "What have you done in your life that I wouldn't guess by looking at you?" frequently yields interesting anecdotes for an article. "I climbed Mount Everest," or "I built an orphanage in Guatemala" add important human interest to a feature story.

3. A good interviewer is a journeyman; a brilliant interviewer is a producer. Based on your research, chart the path of the interview. Make a short list of the most seminal and poignant moments of your interviewee's story. The producer's role is to cue the interviewee to tell his or her story by asking questions in a particular sequence. As producer, what is the best sequence of questions to get the best story?

4. Like a speech, a great interview should have a rhythm. Not all the good stuff in at the start; not all the bad stuff at the end. You want a nice "up-and-down" rhythm to keep things interesting.

5. Experiment with different ways of asking the same question. Your question is really the "set up" for your interviewee to complete the story or provide special detail of a particular story.

## Interviewers to study

<p><b>Charlie Rose</b>, host of "The Charlie Rose Show" PBS - airs daily NOTES: updated website has a vast online archive</p>	<p><a href="#">click here</a></p>
<p><b>Fareed Zakaria</b>, editor of Newsweek  NOTES: Zakaria is editor of all global editions, for 24 million readers</p>	<p><a href="#">click here</a></p>
<p><b>Fareed Zakaria</b>, host of GPS [Global Public Square] CNN – airs Sundays 10 am and 1 pm EST</p>	<p><a href="#">click here</a></p>
<p><b>James Lipton</b>, host of Bravo’s “Inside the Actors Studio,” a show that features actors, directors, and screenwriters Bravo – airs Sundays at 5 pm EST  NOTES: Unfortunately, the Bravo website only has small highlights of some shows.</p>	<p><a href="#">click here</a></p>
<p><b>James Lipton</b>, selected segments and episodes of “Inside the Actors Studio” uploaded to YouTube</p>	<p><a href="#">click here</a></p>