

Developing and interesting interview



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Journalism and Society (9303)

Discussion questions for the week two tutorials

For Peter Clarke's chapter on interviewing from *Australian Journalism Today*, the questions are:

What is it, according to Clarke, that makes the set piece interview of a public figure (often a politician) so dull and arid today? Clarke (2012) relays the manner in which O'Brien asks a question and states that it is difficult to perceive exactly what is being asked due to the wording, also known as 'the hollow dance'. It has all the surface attributes of an authentic process of inquiry and revelation but, upon analysis, it's clear that very little information flows from the verbal content of the interview to the waiting minds of the viewing citizens. They have slim pickings in the form of generalised platitudes. The political interview between Gillard and O'Brien seems so 'frozen' on both sides that it is almost useless. By asking such embellished questions with a lot of room for interpretation (use of metaphors, etc.) it has allowed Gillard, who is already media trained, to give a carefully crafted response which she can use to her advantage. In other words, the journalist has put the interviewee in a position of power which is not advised (Clarke, 2012, pp. 57-76).

What are the main ways that interviewers can overcome this problem? Describe at least two of them as discussed in the chapter. Clarke (2012) explains that Carleton's question is kicked off with a metaphor, but the image it conjured went swiftly to the nub of the event that had recently

occurred and by implication, the intense emotions and fracturing of Labor traditions surrounding that event (Clarke, 2012, p. 59).

Interviewers can consider the ratio of words they are using to question their subjects versus the amount of words being used to answer their questions. To achieve a more balanced interview transaction the interviewer could alter their technique, if necessary, to improve the outcomes of an interview.

Additionally, interviewers can ask short, carefully crafted questions with a stronger interrogative thrust and fewer ‘distractions’ for the wary interviewee to seize upon if avoidance is their main intention – in the style of Leigh Sales (Clarke, 2012, p. 59). By keeping it simple and not asking double or triple barreled questions, you are making it more difficult for the interviewee to stray from the answer you seek.

Can you think of an interview you have seen or read or heard recently that you thought was effective and interesting? Describe what it was that made it effective and interesting for you.

Recently I watched an interview between Andrew Denton and Hugh Jackman on *Enough Rope*. It was interesting because Jackman is notoriously difficult to interview, since he has been interviewed many times throughout his career. Understandably, it would become a bit monotonous. However, Denton managed to seduce the actor with his charm and casual interview technique. The interview escalated from conversational to confessional and Jackman recounted the moment he wet his pants on stage. Denton’s technique was clearly effective, as he extracted personal and somewhat embarrassing details from his interviewee (Denton, 2004).

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Discussion questions for the week six tutorials

For the chapter from *Australian Journalism Today* about covering traumatic events, the questions are:

The chapter discusses the damage that can be caused by careless or indifferent coverage of traumatic events. What specifically is Kimina Lyall talking about? Lyall speaks of common practices that can aggravate powerlessness, such as camping outside a survivor's home despite being asked to leave, or even filming a potential interview subject declining a request for an interview (Lyall, 2012, p. 35). Teichroeb (2009) states that he thinks it's insulting to a victim to go in and take their story and leave and put it in the newspaper without having that relationship – without them being able to say this is OK and this is not (as cited in Lyall, 2012, p. 36). The author also says to avoid the temptation to slot storylines into a series of pre-constructed narratives, such as the hero story or the constructed villain. This type of unthinking, formulaic reporting only serves to frustrate and compound survivor's grief as well as reinforce the community perception (as cited in Lyall, 2012, p. 36). Lyall (2012) mentions that journalists can be tempted into taking short cuts that dispense with basic techniques, including checking facts and verifying events with other people present (Lyall, 2012, p. 37).

What is post-traumatic stress disorder and to what extent does it affect journalists? Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a psychiatric disorder that can affect someone who has witnessed a traumatic event, for example, through military service, surviving a natural disaster, or covering a school

shooting. Some individuals will have stress reactions that do not pass with time and their symptoms can worsen. Individuals who suffer from PTSD often recall the experience through nightmares and flashbacks, have trouble sleeping, and feel isolated or estranged, and these symptoms can be extreme enough to significantly impact the person's daily life. It can affect journalists by making them 'psychologically homeless' along with preventing them from returning to work because it is so severe (Lyall, 2012, p. 30).

What are the main components of self-care for journalists?

Lyall (2012) suggests creating a 'buffer' between the work experience and the home experience by taking time out alone at the end of the assignment, through to exercise or immersion in family life outside of the working day (Lyall, 2012, p. 38). The first step is recognising the risks. Journalists should expect the possibility of experiencing strong feelings themselves, and recognise this is not a sign of professional weakness but a normal human reaction. Essential resilience advice includes getting enough food, water, sleep and exercise - and reducing the reliance on alcohol - during a distressing assignment. During the assignment, intense emotions should be expected, acknowledged and, if possible, shared honestly with colleagues either at the scene or in the newsroom. Journalists should not be afraid to seek professional help if symptoms persist (Lyall, 2012, p. 38).

Reference List

Clarke, P. (2012). The interview: a hollow dance looking for new moves? In M. Ricketson (Eds.), *Australian Journalism Today* (pp. 57-77). South Yarra, Australia: Palgrave Macmillan.

Denton, A. (Presenter). (2004, May 10). Interview with Hugh Jackman [Television broadcast]. *In Enough Rope with Andrew Denton*. Sydney, Australia: ABC.

Lyll, K. (2012). Covering traumatic events without traumatising yourself or others. In M. Ricketson (Eds.), *Australian Journalism Today* (pp. 28-44). South Yarra, Australia: Palgrave Macmillan.

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