## The Report with Clips

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### Introduction

Whenever journalists want to give their listeners information, they can make use of a number of different stylistic forms. These include news, interviews and reports, to name just a few. For reports, the same rules apply as for news: journalists have to stay objective. Their language must be precise and easy to understand.

The words they choose have to be neutral – not loaded or emotional. The aim of a report is to inform the listeners objectively, to tell both sides of a story. This way, the listeners can form their own opinion based on the arguments and views presented.

Basically, there are two types of journalistic reports: straight reports without sound clips and reports with clips. In a straight report, the journalist tells the listeners about an event or issue and the various views and positions the key players have on it. The journalist quotes the arguments of the relevant parties in indirect speech. In contrast to this, the voices of the key players are heard as sound clips in a report with clips. They present their arguments or opinions in short sound bites: authentic and in their own words. As this journalistic format is very attractive to the listeners, we will focus on it in greater detail.

### Definition

The report with clips is an objective, informative journalistic report, which consists of the journalists’ narration and sound clips. In the clips, the key players of the topic the report deals with present their arguments and voice their opinions.

Length: 2 to 5 minutes

### Strengths and weaknesses of the format

We produce reports and reports with clips when we want to cover a topic in greater detail than we could in the news. In a report with clips, we can convey information about complex topics on which there are various opinions, because the key players can voice their views themselves.

For the listener, a report with clips is more varied and more authentic than

a simple report in which only the voice of the journalist will be heard. Each time a new voice appears in a report through sound clips, the voice change gets the listeners’ attention and they will continue following the topic at hand with renewed interest. In contrast to this, a longer report only read by a journalist

or narrator can easily come across as monotonous and boring. If the audience hears the same voice over a longer period of time, it soon loses interest in the subject at hand.

Furthermore, sound clips lend credibility to what the journalist is reporting. The main participants themselves provide the listener with the most important arguments or opinions; hence, the listener knows that nothing has been incor- rectly quoted or misinterpreted. In many cases, the voices of the key players are well known (e.g. politicians or celebrities). So reports with clips containing these

well known voices are also more authentic for the listeners than reports without clips. Dialects and certain well-known speech patterns can add authenticity to

a report with clips. In addition, sound clips are the best way to convey the emo- tions of the interviewees (e.g. of eyewitnesses).

Finally, background ambience sounds included on the tape while recording the sound clip will make such a report more authentic than a simple report. These background noises might occur, for example, if sound clips are recorded during a demonstration, in parliament, near moving water or in a room with specific acoustics. This always conveys to the listener that the journalist was actually at the scene of the event in question, and that makes the overall journalistic report more attractive and more credible than a dry report.

Of course, a report with sound clips also has disadvantages versus a simple report, an interview or news. The most important disadvantage: it is very time-consum- ing to produce. Journalists not only have to research the topic, they must also identify the most important parties involved, contact them and conduct inter- views with them or acquire statements from them.

From this raw material, journalists must then select and edit the best sound clips. Then they have to write their narration linking the selected sound clips and presenting the necessary information, and finally they have to mix their spoken text and the sound clips in the studio or on the computer to create the final product. All in all, this requires considerably more time and demands more sophisticated technical facilities than does a straight report. It is not possible to produce reports with sound clips without a functioning mobile recording device (portable tape recorder, cassette recorder, mini-disc recorder, etc.) and a production studio or audio-editing computer.

Furthermore, please keep in mind that not every sound clip is automatically a good sound clip. If the interview partners are unable to state their views in an understandable way, it is better not to use the sound clip. In such cases, it’s better to summarize what has been said. In addition to this, you should not use sound clips if the interview partners are difficult to understand due to the way they speak (e.g. dialect or speech impediment) or if the technical quality of the sound clips is poor (e.g. poor recording device, unclear telephone line or loud background noise).

A further drawback of sound clips is that they may distract the listener from the information you are trying to get across in your report. In a straight report, you are the one who determines the logical order in which the information is presented. And you choose the words to convey the information according to journalistic principles. In a report with sound clips, however, this sequence of events and the choice of words is dependent on the existing sound material.

Strengths and weaknesses of a report with clips



|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Strengths | Weaknesses |
| Lively (different voices)Credible (the key playerspresent their views and opinions themselves)Authentic (emotions, strong statements of opinion, dialects, background ambience sounds) | Time-intensive and technically complex (research topic, contact interviewees, conduct interviews, edit, final productionNot all interviewees can provide good sound clips Sound clips can distractfrom the core of the information |

### How is it done?

Producing a report with sound clips requires the following steps:

Research topic

What is it about? Who is affected by this topic? How has this topic developed in the past and what is likely to happen in the future? What are the most important contentious issues?

Identify relevant and suitable interview partners

Who are the relevant parties within the context of this topic? What opinions do they represent? Which of these key players are willing to be interviewed and can be reached? Which of them are able to give good statements about this topic?

If the key players are not available for interviews: who else can say something on this topic?

Contact interview partners, agree on dates and venues

In many cases, it is not immediately possible to get statements from all relevant parties. Some interview partners do not have the time or the desire to speak to journalists. Journalists may have to go out of their way to visit their interviewees. This takes time and costs money – so make provisions for this when planning the report. Inform your interview partners that you will only be using some excerpts (statements) of the interview in your report. Your interviewees must be aware of the fact that you will not be broadcasting the entire interview.

Conduct interviews

Only conduct short interviews. Two or three precise questions should be enough to get some good sound clips. The more raw material you return to the studio with, the more you will have to listen to and screen, hence the more time you will lose. Even during the interview, bear in mind that you will need short, concise statements for your report with clips. If your interviewees phrase their thoughts in a manner that is too long-winded or complicated, ask them to repeat what they have just said in a more concise way that will be generally understood. You can also record sound clips at a press conference, during a speech or at other public appearances. Be careful with sound clips that you record from broadcasts by other radio or television stations! You might be infringing on copyright laws.

Listen to interviews

When listening to your recordings, jot down at which points the interviewees say something that can be used as a sound clip. Write down the exact words – especially the first and last words of the statements – so that you will be able to lead into the clip with good narration and ensure that the text following the sound clip picks up where the interviewee left off (> page 25 ff.).

Transfer sound clips and edit

If the production is analogue (on tape), you will have to transfer your sound clips from cassette to tape so that you can edit them. If the production is digital, you need to transfer the sound clips to the editing computer so that you can work on them with audio-editing software. Do not transfer the entire interviews, just the parts containing the sound clips you plan to use in your report. This saves time. Some journalists prefer to transfer and edit their sound clips only after they have written and recorded their own narration texts. But this depends on personal preference and the technical facilities of the broadcaster (studio availability; independent PC editing, or analogue editing with a tape machine – either with or without a sound technician).

Write text

Write your narration texts around the sound clips. Your link text should provide all the necessary facts and create bridges between the sound clips. Ensure that you identify all speakers with their name, function, and, if necessary, their title so that the listener always knows who is speaking.

Record voice tracks

Record your journalistic narration text in the studio. Leave short pauses at the points where you want to insert the sound clips.

Final production

Insert the sound clips into the tape or sound file containing your narration.

The report with sound clips is finished. To be on the safe side, listen to the entire report one final time to ensure that all transitions are correct and the report is logical and understandable.

### Stumbling blocks

Clips from only one side

Often, we may not be able to get sound clips from all relevant parties.

In the report on the planned new factory, you have a sound clip from an opponent of the project (e.g. from a local resident who will have to move out of his house), but no sound clip from a person in favour of the scheme (e.g. from arepresentative of the multinational corporation that wants to build the factory).

In such cases, you yourself will have to summarise the arguments of the party that does not appear in a sound clip in your narration. Even if you were not able to get interviews with all the key players, you have to present all relevant views on the topic to your listeners. Your reporting must always stay neutral and objective. If one of the parties refuses to talk to you, you may mention this in your report. The listeners can then draw their own conclusions.

Clips too long

As we discussed before, a sound clip should not be longer than 15 – 30 seconds

(> page 32 ff.). But often, the statements we want to use are longer. If, for example, an interviewee needs 60 seconds to make his or her point, you may be able to shorten the clip by only using its first sentences, then transcribe the next two or three sentences in indirect speech and go back into the last part of the sound clip.

Continuing sound clip (too long for the listener)

Resident R: *I have lived in this neighbourhood all my life and feel at home here. Every stone in these streets harbours memories for me. I belong here. I know where to shop around here, where I can meet my girlfriend in the evening and where the local doctor is. My grandparents also lived in this neighbourhood. My parents live in the house next door and all my relatives live close by. If we are now moved to skyscrapers on the edge of town, we will all be torn apart. Besides, my parents are much too old to adapt to a new environment now. If they were evicted from their old house, the worry and upheaval would probably kill them.*

Interrupted sound clip (same statement, but greater variety)

Resident R: *I have lived in this neighbourhood all my life and feel at home here. Every stone in these streets harbours memories for me. I belong here. I know where to shop around here, where I can meet my girlfriend in the evening and where the local doctor is.*

The Interview

### Introduction

In our daily lives, we all speak with other people – mostly to exchange information and to find out what’s new. And even if we are not aware of it: we are constantly conducting interviews. “How are you?” – “Oh, not too good today.” – “Why not, what’s wrong?” – “I wanted to go on vacation, but I couldn’t.” – “And why not?” – “My wife is sick.” – “What’s wrong with her?” etc. Such a question-and-answer game is nothing unusual and we conduct it with ease in our everyday lives.

So, why should conducting a radio interview be any different? After all, it is not difficult to ask questions and those who ask should also get answers. In a journal- istic interview, this isn’t always the case. One crucial difference is the time factor. In radio, the time we are given to get the relevant information from our interview partner is limited. Often, radio interviews will only be two or three minutes long. Therefore, only a journalist who asks the right questions can expect to get good answers within this timeframe. Interviewing people is an art that can be mas- tered, if certain fundamental rules are followed.

### Definition

The interview is a focussed exchange of questions and answers with the objective of acquiring information. It aims to get comprehensive and clear information from the interview partner within the shortest possible time. An interview can be conducted with the intention of broadcasting the complete exchange of questions and answers. An interview can also be conducted in order to research information or to record individual statements for news items or reports. One thing holds true for any interview: the interviewee is the main person. His or her answers are the most important thing in the interview. We journalists only ask questions on behalf of the listeners – the questions they would ask the interview partner if they had a chance to talk to him or her. Our questions should be short and precise and directly targeted to reach our information goal. We have to stay unbiased and should avoid getting emotional. Our personal opinions must not shine through at any time during the interview.

Length: between 3 and 20 minutes

Strengths and weaknesses of an interview



|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Strengths | Weaknesses |
| Authentic, credible First-hand information, opinions and emotions Contains spontaneous,unplanned elements that are surprising and attractive for the listenerMakes the programme lively Cheap and quick to produce | Risk of confusing the listener if you do not strictly adhere to a logical structureOnly presents one person’s opinionIt can be difficult for the journalist to stay in control of theinterview – especially when dealing with very experienced interview partnersExperts have a tendency to use jargon; here, the journalist has to intervene and ask the expert to repeat the information using simpler words |

### Different forms of interviews

There are various forms of an interview. The distinguishing factor between them is the information goal that you are trying to reach.

Interviews to be broadcast as a whole Information interview

The aim of an information interview is to find out facts and figures about a certain topic. The interviewee’s views on the topic or his personality are not relevant, what counts is his or her expertise. Therefore, the interview partners in information interviews are mostly experts, politicians or people directly involved in a topic.

The international pharmaceutical company PILLCO has negotiated a contract with the regional government about the rehousing of the residents of BIGTOWN, which will be signed by the responsible parties today. The listeners should find out what exactly PILLCO and the city have agreed on in this contract.

Interviewees could be representatives of PILLCO, but also someone working for the local administration or the mayor.

Question: *What environmental protection measures are specified in the contract?* Answer: *The Environmental Ministry has defined maximum quotas for harmful emissions, and these must not be exceeded. The same applies to waste water that flows into the general waste water network.*

Question: *How will you be able to ensure that PILLCO will stick to these limits?* Answer: *This is also outlined in the contract. An independent institute will carry out measurements every six months.*

Opinion interview

The objective of this type of interview is to find out the opinion or viewpoint of the interviewee on a specific issue, event or development.

The contract between the pharmaceutical company PILLCO and the city on the construction of a new factory in BIGTOWN has been finalised. But now

there are new problems: The residents of BIGTOWN are demonstrating because their homes will be demolished and because they will have to be rehoused.

The citizens’ group Initiative Against Rehousing wants to appeal to the courts to halt the project. And environmentalists are protesting against potential environmental damage. Will PILLCO still go through with the project? To find out how the chairman C of the company’s Board of Directors feels about these new problems, you conduct an opinion interview.

Question: *Mr. C, in view of the emerging difficulties, what is your stance on the demands to scrap the plans for building the new factory?*

Answer: *Scrapping the plans to build the factory is out of the question. I believe that these demands are without substance. The current situation has primarily arisen because representatives of the city did not inform the residents of the benefits that building the new factory will bring for them: jobs, new homes and an improved social environment.*

Question: *How do you rate your chances if this matter ends up in court?* Answer: *I am not worried about any potential court case. Company lawyers drafted the contracts very carefully. Everything is watertight.*

Personality interview (portrait)

Here, the focus is on the personality of the interview partner. The questions mainly deal with the life, character and experiences of the interviewee.

In recent weeks, the spokesperson S of the citizens’ group Initiative Against Rehousing has become the figurehead of the protests and turned into a promi- nent figure in BIGTOWN. Listeners already know a lot about his activities, but very little about him personally. You would like to change this and conduct a personality interview with him.

Question: *Mr. S, you have practically become the spearhead of resistance against rehousing for the residents of BIGTOWN. How come you got so involved in*

*this issue?*

Answer: *This whole struggle is about fighting injustice. Even as a child, injustice was the worst thing for my brother and me. We learned this from our parents.* Question: *So, what forms of injustice did you witness as a child?*

Answer: *Well, for instance, if a teacher punished one of my classmates without reason, I would stand up and support that classmate.*

In practice, a clear-cut distinction between these different forms of interviews is not always possible. And sometimes it is not even desirable. Most of your inter- views will contain elements of different forms – for example an opinion interview with some information questions thrown in. But it helps you stay on track with your questions if you define your interview goal beforehand and if you know which interview format will lead you to that goal. If you have not clearly defined your interview goal, your questions and the interviewee’s answers will get side- tracked and your listener will get confused.

Interviews as tools

The three interview formats we have dealt with so far are conducted and recorded so that they can be broadcast as a whole. But journalists also conduct interviews for research purposes or to get some isolated statements for a report with clips.

Research interview

If you want to research or double-check information, you conduct a research interview. This kind of interview is usually not broadcast. Your only aim is to get additional information that you will use for writing a report, a commentary or a news item.

Environmentalists say that the factory that PILLCO wants to build in BIG-TOWN will pollute the air. You have heard that PILLCO plans to invest around one billion Euros in environmental protection measures. But you don‘t know what exactly these measures will be. To find out, you conduct a research interview with a representative of PILLCO with the goal of confirming the amount to be invested in environmental protection measures and getting more information about the kind of measures that PILLCO plans to take.

Statement interview

This type of interview is designed to yield an individual statement that will become part of another journalistic piece, e.g. a sound bite for a report or a news item.

You are writing a report on the fact that the construction of the new pharma- ceutical factory will require the demolition of homes and the rehousing of residents. You conduct an interview with the chairman C of PILLCO‘s Board of Directors and one with the spokesperson S of the citizens’ group Initiative

Against Rehousing. Then you take the strongest statements from the interviews and use them as sound bites for your report.

C: *All residents who will be rehoused can rest assured that they will get modern new homes that are affordable.*

S: *We don’t believe a word of what the company is saying. PILLCO has never kept any promises that it made in the past.*

### How is it done?

Preparing the interview

First, you have to research the topic of your interview. Focus on just one topic. Don’t ask questions about side aspects – otherwise your interviewee will get carried away and the listeners will be confused. Next, you should define your interview goal. Ask yourself what the listeners want to know about this topic and what information is relevant for them. Do your research properly. Nothing is more embarrassing than if an interviewee corrects mistakes in your questions during an interview or if your interview partner gets away with making false statements because you did not know enough about the topic and did not realize how you were being manipulated or tricked. And finally: Define a lead question for the interview as a whole.

Lead question: ‘How will PILLCO fulfil the environmental protection measures laid down in the contract?’

You might not actually ask this question in your interview. But your interview as a whole should serve to answer the lead question. Every question and answer should add a little piece to the puzzle, so that at the end, the listener sees the whole picture – and has the answer to the lead question. In order to reach this goal, the following steps are necessary:

Selecting the interviewees, the venue and time

The success and failure of an interview depends largely on choosing the right interview partners. There are many things you need to consider when deciding whom to interview: their expertise, their ability to explain things in a straight- forward way, their position and views with regard to the topic of the interview. In addition, you need to know whether your interviewee will be available for the interview and willing to talk on the radio. It is also good to know beforehand whether your interview partner is someone who is quiet and shy or someone who will talk a lot during the interview.

The time of the interview will depend on the interviewee’s schedule or – if it is a live interview – on when your radio programme is on the air. If you are conduct- ing the interview by telephone, you cannot influence where the interviewee will be when he or she answers your questions. However, if you are able to determine venue and time, remember that you need time for an interview. If either you or your interview partner feels rushed, the result will most likely be unsatisfactory. The venue is also important to reduce any inhibitions the interviewee may have.

After having considered all possibilities, you decide to interview the chairman C of PILLCO’s Board of Directors. Your lead question is: ‘How will PILLCO imple- ment the environmental protection measures laid down in the contract?’ He

is likely to feel most comfortable in a familiar environment, e.g. in his office at the PILLCO company. The spokesperson S of the Initiative Against Rehousing, on the other hand, will probably give very lively answers if you interview him somewhere in BIGTOWN because he will associate this area with his fight.

Briefing the interviewees

Before you start conducting an interview, you should always brief your interviewee about some things:

* What is the topic and the focus of the interview?
* How long will the interview take?
* Will the interview be recorded or broadcast live?
* When will the interview be broadcast?
* Will it be broadcast as a whole or is it just a research or statement interview?
* When and where will the interview be conducted?
* Will it be a one-on-one interview, or will other interviewees or additional journalists be present?

One of the advantages of such an interview briefing is that you and your interview partner get to know each other. It can break the ice and reduce nervousness.

You will also get an idea of how your interviewee answers questions: does he or she beat around the bush, go into great detail or are the answers short and to the point?

In your interview briefing, you should inform your interview partner about the topic and focus of the interview, but you should not discuss the questions you want to ask. If you go into too much detail, your interview partner might later, when you are recording, feel like everything has already been said. You run the risk that the answers will sound like they’ve been rehearsed or that your interview partner does not mention important information again. Only in the case of an extremely insecure or difficult interview partner can it make sense to discuss the first question beforehand. This may help to reduce the interviewee’s anxiety.

Do not give your interviewee a list of the questions you plan to ask during the interview. You will lose control of the interview. If your interviewee asks for such a list, try to convince him or her that you will stick to the topic of the interview and that you will not ask any questions that are unfair. You may also tell your interviewee that your station never supplies the questions beforehand. If your interviewee still insists, you have two choices: you can tell him or her that you

will look for a different interview partner. Faced with such prospects, interviewees sometimes decide that they will give the interview after all because they are eager to present their views on the radio. If you cannot find another qualified interview partner, give this interviewee a list of questions. Make sure to write ‘list of some possible questions’ on the top of it. This way you remain flexible to change the order, leave out questions or include others if the interview situation demands it.

### Different forms of questions

You will not get good answers if you ask unclear questions. To make sure that the interview will be successful, you should be familiar with some basic forms of questions. You ought to know what effect they will have and when to use them.

Closed questions Yes/no question

This form of question only allows a ‘yes’, ‘no’ or ‘I don’t know’ answer. In most cases, you will have to ask a follow-up question to find out more. This can be a waste of time. Yes/no questions are good to pinpoint an interviewee on a certain topic, but they will not get the interviewee talking.

not good:

Question: *Mr. Mayor, do you believe PILLCO will fulfil the environmental protec- tion measures laid down in the contract?*

Answer: *Yes.*

Question: *What makes you think that?*

Answer: *In the contract with PILLCO, these measures are described in great detail. In addition, we’ve also clearly defined penalty payments in the event that these measures are not adhered to.*

better:

Question: *Mr. Mayor, which environmental protection measures does PILLCO have to fulfil according to the contract?*

Answer: *The contract specifies that PILLCO has to stick to some precisely defined limits for emissions. If PILLCO exceeds these limits, the company will have to*

*pay damages.*

In some cases, you may, however, choose to ask a closed question in order to get the interviewee to give a short, precise answer.

Question: *Mr. Mayor, you have been accused of taking bribes in conjunction with the construction of the new pharmaceutical factory. Is this true?*

Answer: *No.*

You have intentionally chosen a closed question because you wanted a definite ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answer.

Information question

This form of a closed question is used if you want to get a short and precise infor- mation. It is also suitable as a follow-up question or in order to specify an issue.

Question: *How many people will have to be rehoused?*

Answer: *According to our estimates it will be around 2,000.*

Open questions

The answers to open questions are usually longer. You are giving the interviewee a chance to go into more detail, to explain the background, reasons, developments or personal opinions.

Question: *Why it is essential for the factory to be built in BIGTOWN?*

Answer: *BIGTOWN seemed the most suitable site because …* (this is followed by various reasons for choosing the site)

Special forms of question

Statement plus question:

The interviewer states a fact and then adds a question.

Question: *Most people in BIGTOWN are against rehousing. Why haven’t you thought about building the factory somewhere else?*

You should only choose this form of question if you are absolutely sure that the fact you are stating is correct. If your statement is false or needs explanation, the interviewee will start a discussion about your incorrect statement instead

of answering your question. You run the risk of the interview developing into an argument, something that you should avoid at all costs.

Suggestive question:

With a suggestive question, you are implying something in the hope that your interviewee will agree or disagree in a very lively way. This form of question can force the interviewee to take a stance and make the interview more dynamic.

Question: *Mr. Mayor, you are an ardent supporter of the new pharmaceutical factory and the rehousing project that will go with it. So you are ready to accept that many people will practically be uprooted?*

Answer: *No, of course I am not. I am very concerned about the well-being of the residents of this city. That’s why the new apartments will be built close by. This will allow old neighbours to stay in touch with each other.*

But be careful: a suggestive question can sometimes be seen as a provocation by the interviewee. This could spoil the atmosphere of your interview. A disturbance on the relationship level of the interview will also affect the information level.

If things turn sour, your interviewee might even refuse to answer or ask a counter-question. In the end, your listeners will perceive your questions as unfair or even aggressive.

Interpreting question

If the interviewee is not clear in his or her answers or tries to get away without making a clear statement, you can offer a possible interpretation in a follow-up question. This would force the interviewee to take a stance and make the original answer understandable for the listener.

Question: *So that means the factory could not have been built in any other part of town?*

Answer: *Yes, that is what I think.*

This precise answer makes the interviewee’s position clear for the listener.

Indirect question

In an indirect question, you confront your interviewee with a statement made by a third party. Usually, this statement will be in opposition to what the interviewee thinks or says. Since you can hide behind the critical remarks that someone else made, this method allows you to be somewhat confrontational without hurting the interview atmosphere.

Question: *Environmental groups say that the new factory will cause considerable air pollution. What is your response to such claims?*

Answer: *These claims are completely unsubstantiated. I can provide you with calculations that clearly show there is no risk at all.*

Sequence of questions

The interview as a whole should answer a lead question . Getting an answer to this lead question is the information goal of your interview. It is usually best to start an interview with a general question. This will give the interviewee a

chance to talk freely and to get used to the interview situation. Your first question should be interesting and new for your interviewee and for your listeners. If your first question is one that your interview partner has already answered frequently in other interviews, he or she will not develop much interest in your interview, will be bored and provide answers that sound like they’ve been rehearsed. How- ever, if you ask your interview partner an unusual question as an opener, he or she will be drawn into the interview – and so will your listeners.

It is essential to get the listeners’ attention from the start of an interview and to make them feel that it’s worth their time to keep on listening. Radio listeners de- cide within the first 30 seconds of an interview whether they will keep listening or whether they will mentally switch off. So the first question of your interview will already determine whether you will have an interested and attentive audience or not. Do not open your interview with a question like ‘Could you tell us something about …?’ or ‘Would you like to say something about …?’. Such questions are much too broad, too unfocussed. Your interview partner can say whatever he or she likes and take the interview into any direction he or she desires. This will mean that you’ve lost control of the interview from the start.

One traditional form for an interview is the so-called funnel-structure. You start off with rather general questions. During the course of the interview, you get more and more specific, until you end with a yes/no question that pinpoints your interviewee. This way, your interview ends on a clear statement from the inter- viewee. And this will leave your listeners with the impression that the interview was worth their while because it left them with clear and concise information.

You are interviewing the chairman C of PILLCO’s Board of Directors about the planned environmental protection measures. Your lead question is: How will PILLCO fulfil the environmental protection measures laid down in the contract?

Question: *Environmental protection is very important to the people of BIGTOWN with regard to the new factory. What aspects of environmental protection are important to you?*

Answer: *A clean and healthy environment is also important to the people at PILLCO. That’s why PILLCO will do everything it can to make sure that the air, the water of the river and the ground will not be contaminated.*

Question: *But environmentalist groups in BIGTOWN are not convinced that you will be doing enough?*

Answer: *Well, what the environmental activists say is nothing but propaganda. Once the factory has been built, you will see that we’ll stick to all the environmental protection measures laid down in the contract.*

Question: *Which measures are these exactly?*

Answer: *We will secure clean air by using state-of-the-art filtering systems.*

*We will also build a sewage facility to clean our waste water. This facility will operate independently from the public sewage system. This way we can ensure that no harmful substances can get into the public water system.*

Question: *How will you make sure that the environmental protection measures are implemented?*

Answer: *We have commissioned an independent institute to monitor this. The institute is also approved by the local authorities.*

Question: *Do you believe that this will be sufficient to disperse the concerns of the residents and of the environmentalists?*

Answer: *Yes, I am sure of it. And I think that all the sceptics will be convinced once the plant is up and running.*

Do not stick to a sequence of questions that you may have prepared. Instead, try to derive your questions out of the answers you get. This way, the flow of the interview sounds natural and logical. It is vital that you listen to what your

interviewee says. If you give interview partners the feeling that you are personally interested in their answers, they will give much livelier answers than if they feel that you are just ticking off a list of questions.

### Stumbling blocks

Badly worded questions Either /or question

If you ask an either/or question, you narrow your interviewee down to only two alternatives. But instead of the either-or alternative, your interviewee would possibly have mentioned a third option that you did not think of. Either/or questions will usually require follow-up questions. This wastes time and can be confusing to the listeners.

Question: *Are you against the construction of the new factory in principle or are you primarily concerned that PILLCO will violate the environmental protection measures?* Answer: *Of course the environmental protection measures must be implemented. If this does not happen, the residents will be at risk.*

From this answer, you do not learn whether the environmentalist opposes the construction of the factory. You have to ask a follow-up question. This would not have been necessary if you had asked the question differently.

Multiple questions

Multiple questions create confusion and lead to you losing control of the interview. Your interview partner can decide which part of the question he or she wishes to answer. It’s better to always ask one question at a time.

Question: *How many jobs will the construction of the new factory create and what will this mean for the regional economy?*

Answer: *It will strengthen the regional economy. After all, some of the products manufactured in the new factory will be exported and that is good for this coun- try’s trade balance.*

The interviewee did not answer the question of how many jobs would be cre- ated. You will have to ask a follow-up question. This will waste time and inter- rupt the flow of the interview.

Technical stumbling blocks

Interesting interview partners and clever questions are worthless if technical problems ruin your interview. Always make sure that your technical equipment is working before you start recording an interview. Test your recording device, your microphone and the levels before the interview. Always take a foam wind screen for your microphone with you to avoid wind noise. Check whether your batter- ies are charged and bring spare batteries. After the interview, check whether the recording is all right. Do this while your interviewee is still around. If you discover that technical problems have spoiled your recording, you may be able to convince your interview partner to repeat the interview.

### What to do if …

… the interviewee’s answers are too long?

Non-verbal interruption: Open your mouth and take a breath as if you wanted to start speaking. This will show your interview partner that you want to ask your next question. You could also indicate with your hand that you would like to say something.

Direct interruption: If the interviewee takes a breath, interrupt with ‘but’ and add a short, quick question like ‘why?’ or ‘can you give an example?’. You can also inter- rupt by calling interviewees by their name: ‘Mr./Mrs. X, …’. For most people, hearing their own name is a key stimulus. It will startle them and make them come to a halt.

… you would like to get your interviewee to continue talking?

Show your interview partner you are interested in what he or she is saying by nodding and keeping eye contact. This is normally interpreted by the interviewee as approval and will encourage him or her to continue talking. Sometimes it

also works if you simply do not ask your next question when your interviewee has come to the end of his or her answer. Just look at him or her encouragingly, smile and nod. Your interviewee will usually find the silence awkward and con- tinue talking.

… you panic, lose track of what is being said?

In such cases, you can ask a so-called parachute question. This is a question that works in almost any context – regardless of what the interviewee said before.

Examples for parachute questions are: ‘Why?’, ‘What does that mean?’ or ‘What makes you so sure?’ The interviewee will usually reiterate what he or she said before and go into greater detail. This gives you enough time to overcome your initial panic, refocus and think up the next question. Another parachute question is: ‘Could you give an example?’ Or you could just simply repeat your interview partner’s last words and turn them into a question.

Answer: *Once the factory has been built, you will see that we’ll stick to all the environmental protection measures laid down in the contract. But what the envi- ronmental protection groups are saying is, of course, nothing but propaganda.* Question: *Nothing but propaganda?*

Answer: *Yes! These environmental activists are really only interested in mani- pulating people with half-truths.*