

# Pack 103, Item 12

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**How to conduct an effective interview**

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***What is an effective radio interview?***

Wikipedia defines an interview as “a conversation between two or more people where questions are asked by the interviewer to elicit facts or statements from the interviewee.” (Wikipedia 2015)

For Farm Radio International’s purposes, an *effective radio interview* is a conversation between an interviewer (usually a program host) or reporter and an interviewee (a farmer, an expert, an official) in which the interviewer is able to gather information, opinion, and emotion from the interviewee that is important for the listener to hear.

***How can an interview help me serve my listeners better?***

* Listeners love to listen in on a conversation between two interesting people.
* Listeners will hear the voices of the men and women farmers like themselves, and will better understand their importance as farmers and citizens
* Listeners will hear from the people who are making the news

***How can conducting effective interviews help me produce better radio programs?***

* Interviewing prompts me to be a better researcher so I am ready to discuss a topic
* Interviewing makes me a good listener who captures the essence of what the interviewee has to say.

***How do I get started?*** (Learn more about these and other points in the *Details* section below.)

- Decide on the purpose of the interview

- Choose an interviewee who has something to say

- Plan your questions in advance

- Engage the interviewee.

- Be a good listener

- Keep control of the interview

- Respect your interviewee

- Be a good listener

- Edit down to the essence if it is too long

- Learn about the three main kinds of interviews you will do

***Details***

**Decide on the purpose of the interview.** Not all interviews do the same thing. You might interview someone:

- to expose important information,

- to hold that person to account,

- to reveal the life and work and personality of an individual, or

- for some other reason.

**Choose an interviewee who has something to say.** This might be an ordinary farmer or a farming expert or an official. They have been chosen by the host or producer to serve the purpose of the interview. The interviewee should:

- have the knowledge that is needed, and

- be able to communicate in a clear and interesting way.

**Plan your interview questions in advance.** To ensure that your interview will be effective, you need a clear purpose. Then you need to write a list of interview questions that will prompt the interviewee to provide the information you need. For example, if you are interviewing a farmer about a bad harvest, first, provide an intro that tells listeners that Mrs. Susan Ajorno grows maize in a certain place, and her harvest this year has not been good.

Then ask these questions:

- Mrs. Ajorno, how much maize did you harvest this year?

- How does that harvest compare with harvests over the last five or more years?

- What impact will this have on your family?

- How can you make up the food your family needs?

- Do you know why productivity is declining?

- Are any maize growers in your area getting better yields?

- If so, what is their explanation?

- What does the extension agent say might help improve productivity?

- What are you going to do next to solve this problem?

**Engage the interviewee.** You, the interviewer, must engage the interviewee respectfully, and, through a series of questions and statements, prompt the interviewee to respond. Sometimes you will need to encourage an interviewee who is not used to being on air. At other times, you will need to bring the interviewee back to the topic to answer questions that you want answered. In addition to following his or her prepared questions, the interviewer must listen carefully for clues dropped by the interviewee that might be worth pursuing.

**Be a good listener.** Many people ask their question and then stop listening because they are already thinking of what they will be asking next. Don’t do that. You might miss a key element of the information being conveyed or of the story being told. And then you will not be able to ask the appropriate follow-up questions to go as deep into the topic as possible in the time you have.

**Keep control of the interview.** An interview is not a simple conversation where two people chat and each can raise subjects or ask questions. An interview has a purpose, and you must act to achieve that purpose. Keep the interviewee “on topic,” and have questions ready that will prompt the interviewee to go deeper or broader—depending on what you need. Sometimes, when you interview an official or a politician, they will try to bend your interview to their purposes by changing the subject to something they are happier to talk about. Letting them do so will serve their purposes, but won’t serve your audience.

**Respect your interviewee.** Remember that, if you don’t have an interviewee who will talk on topic, you don’t have an interview! Make your interviewee feel comfortable. Even if the interviewee is describing something that is distasteful to some or many listeners, treat the interviewee with respect. (Distasteful topics might include: using insects as animal feed; eating certain types of food; criticizing a government official, talking about female genital cutting, etc.) Remember that you might have to interrupt an interviewee if they stray far off topic. However, bring them back with respectful comments that make it clear that you are simply working to achieve what should be the common purpose of the interview.

**Edit down to the essence, if needed.** Sometimes you have to interview someone who does not speak clearly, or who is known to ramble on, or who might make hateful statements. If at all possible, record that interview in advance, and then cut it down to an appropriate length. Be careful that the edited interview is a fair, accurate, and balanced representation of what your interviewee said.

**Learn about the three main kinds of interviews you will do.**

During your career as a farm radio broadcaster, you will do many kinds of interviews, but to serve your farmer-listeners well, you will need to master at least the following three kinds of interviews:

**1) The information interview:** The purpose of this kind of interview is to *gather and share information that is useful to your farmer-listeners*. For example, if you find out that many farmers are making compost in an inefficient way, then you need to find someone who both knows how to make better compost and is a good communicator. This could be an extension worker or a competent farmer. If at all possible, you will pre-interview that person, that is, interview them before you record or before you go to air, to satisfy yourself that this person actually knows the topic and is a clear and interesting communicator. During the interview, you ask questions that prompt your interviewee to provide information in a logical sequence that will be easy for your listeners to follow. At times, you will break in and ask for a clarification, or to make a link between two ideas. At the end, you will summarize the information that has been provided.

**2) The farmer interview:** Farm radio is all about farmers—men and women—and how they tackle the challenges of farming. Listeners love to hear how other farmers are doing: how they are dealing with depleted soils, how they are protecting their harvest from weevils, how they are feeding their families better than last year. In this kind of interview, your main task is to be supportive of the farmer, who might have very little experience being interviewed for radio. Before the live or recorded interview begins, put the interviewee at ease by explaining how the interview will proceed, assuring them that you are there to help, and perhaps sharing some personal information that will help them see you as a friend (e.g., mention that your mother has the same problem in her garden, or that you come from the next village). The purpose of sharing personal information is to help establish a rapport and make the interviewee comfortable. Don’t go overboard and share too many personal details. And share something that is straightforward and true, rather than trying to manipulate the interviewee. During the interview, your task is to encourage the farmer to reveal all they can about the part of farming life that is the topic of this interview. You will ask “open-ended” questions that prompt long answers. You will provide suggestions for what the farmer can talk about next. You will clarify terms that you think your listeners might not understand. The purpose of the farmer interview is to help your listeners—men and women farmers —understand that there are many others who face the same challenges, seek the same solutions, are frustrated by the same government slowness, etc. For further information, read the FRI BH2 “How to get farmers talking about things that are important to them” [***here***](http://www.farmradio.org/radio-resource-packs/package-96-the-root-of-life/how-to-get-farmers-talking-about-important-things-facilitating-farmer-voice/).

**3) The accountability interview:** This is the toughest interview of all. In it, you take the grievances of your farmer-listeners to an official who has some responsibility for the issues about which the farmers are complaining, and you prompt the official to explain what is being done to resolve the grievances. Preparation for this interview is crucial. You must have solid facts about the grievance (for example, that nothing has been done about the road improvements that were scheduled to start four months ago), and you must find an official who actually does have some responsibility and authority. During the interview, you will need to be careful that the official does not try to deflect the conversation towards topics he or she feels more comfortable with. And you might need to be tenacious with follow-up questions to get to the bottom of how the grievance is actually being dealt with. For further information, read the FRI BH2 “How to hold officials to account” [***here***](http://www.farmradio.org/radio-resource-packs/package-100-aquaculture-the-value-chain/holding-officials-to-account).

***Other points about effective interviewing***

**Start simply.** If you are new to interviewing, start with easy interviews with people who are comfortable with you, and you with them, about topics that are not controversial. As you gain experience, branch out and deal with topics that are more emotional, with interviewees who might be somewhat hostile, that deal with topics that are more sensitive. Listen to your interview later. Learn from it.

**Promote it!** You might have just recorded an interview you are very pleased with. But it is not a success unless a lot of people hear it. In the days before the broadcast, promote the interview and the program. Run a brief, interesting clip from the interview that will make listeners want more.

**The gender factor.** In many rural cultures, women, while being crucial participants in farming, are interviewed far less often than men. There are reasons for this. Women have less time for interviews. Women have less access to a mobile phone to do an interview. Many women live within a culture where some people discourage women from speaking out. But women are as important to the future of family farming as men. It is your duty and your challenge to find good women interviewees and get their voices to air. For further information, read the FRI BH2 “How to serve your women farmers well” [here](http://scripts.farmradio.fm/radio-resource-packs/103-2/10-how-to-serve-your-women-farmers-well/).

***Where else can I learn about conducting effective interviews?***

* BBC Academy, undated. *Interviewing techniques: 5 Alive’s Peter Allen*. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/academy/journalism/article/art20130702112133431>
* Columbia University website, undated. *Interviewing principles*. <http://www.columbia.edu/itc/journalism/isaacs/edit/MencherIntv1.html>
* Twist Image, 2009. 12 Ways to Conduct a Great Interview. *Six Pixels of Separation: The Blog*. <http://www.twistimage.com/blog/archives/12-ways-to-conduct-a-great-interview/>
* Mediacollege.com, undated. *Interview technique*. <http://www.mediacollege.com/journalism/interviews/>

***Definitions***

*Effective radio interview*: A conversation between an interviewer (usually a program host) and an interviewee (a farmer, an expert, an official) in which the interviewer is able to gather information, opinion and emotion from the interviewee that is important for the listener to hear.

*Gender*: Socially constructed roles and responsibilities of men and women, their expected behaviours and attitudes. For example, in most of the world, women do more housework than men. By contrast, “sex” is defined as “universal and biological differences between men and women,” and is something you are born with. Unlike sex, gender is something that changes over time and between cultures.

*Open-ended questions*: Questions thatcannot be answered with a simple "yes" or "no," or with a specific piece of information, and which give the interviewee scope to give the information that seems appropriate to them. Open-ended questions are sometimes phrased as a statement which requires a response. Examples of open-ended questions include:

* What are the Ministry’s purposes in launching this project?
* How do you see the project unfolding in the future?
* Tell me about the people who started the project.
* Why did you choose that project from the others which were proposed?

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