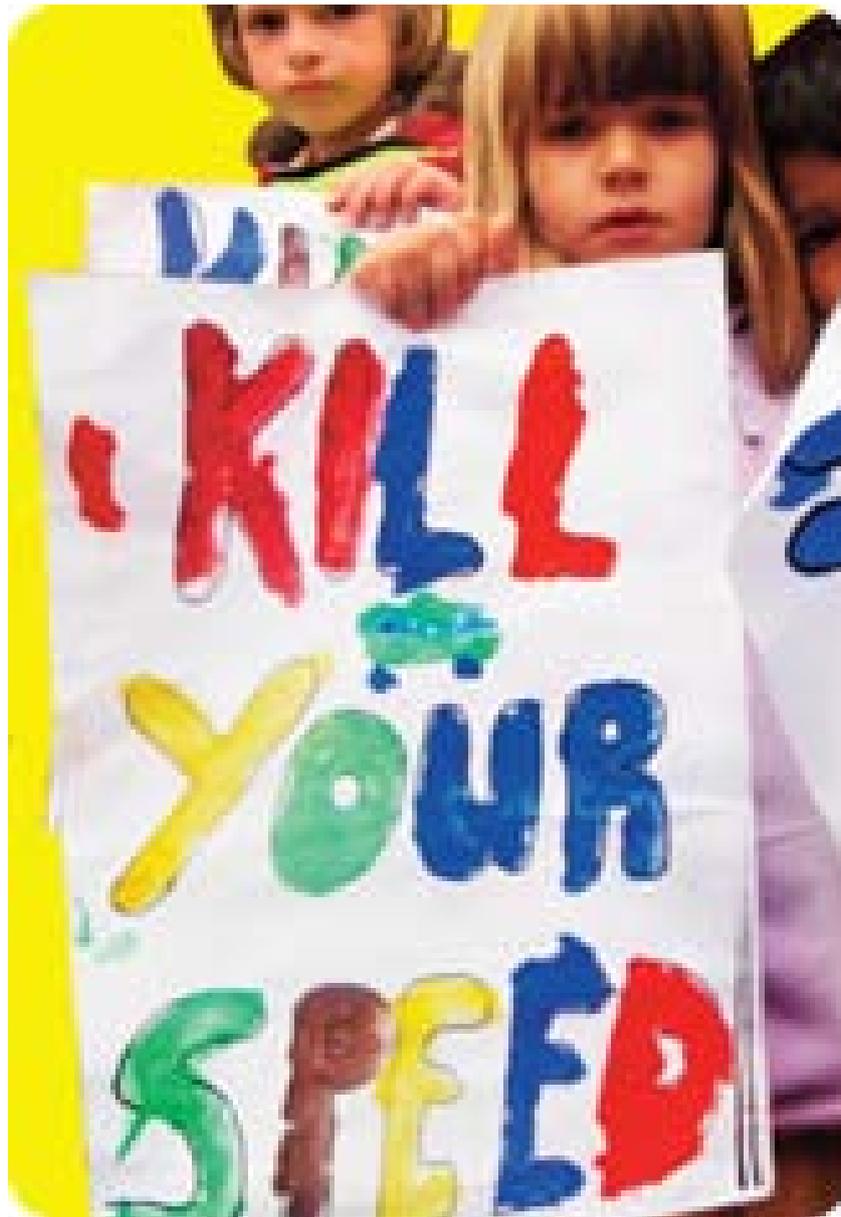


Giving broadcast interviews for radio or TV



A guide for campaigners

INTRODUCTION

This guide provides you with the framework to give effective broadcast interviews, whether on a local community radio station, or a TV chat show. It explains that to give an effective interview requires preparation, thought and effort. Anyone can give an interview, but it is not a small undertaking to achieve an effective interview that can change people's attitudes to road safety and their behaviour on roads in a positive way.

1. KNOWLEDGE

1.1 What is the problem?

You need to know what the problem is, and be able to explain it. It is not enough to say there is a problem with drink drivers, for example. You need to predict the questions that journalists and the public will want to know, and have that knowledge to give them, within reason. You must never claim something that you cannot back up with a fact. Here are some suggestions of who, what, why, when, where and how questions you could research on the topic of drink driving to help you 'be the expert'. These questions give you a flavour of how you should think when preparing for an interview.

- WHO is drink driving in your area? Is it young, middle aged, or old drivers or all three? Is it males or females or both?
- WHAT is drink driving? What is the legal limit? What amount of alcohol affects your driving?
- HOW many drink drivers are there in your area?
- WHAT is the consequence of drink driving? HOW many deaths and injuries are there; how many licence endorsements and losses.
- WHAT is being done about it? HOW many police checks are there in your area? Have these gone up in recent years? Or down? WHERE and WHEN do they take place? WHAT is the expenditure on enforcement of this kind?
- WHERE are drink drivers? Is drink driving more prevalent among people who live in the towns in your area or rural areas or both? WHEN do people drink-drive? Is it more prevalent at Christmas or in the summer?
- WHY are people drink driving? is it a social problem? Is it confusion over the drink drive limit? Is it because drivers think they can get away with it?

Ways to get answers to these questions:

- government and Brake websites;
- your local council;
- your local police force;
- your local MP may be able to ask questions in parliament;
- do your own local street survey of local drivers' attitudes and behaviour;

1.2 Help! I can't possibly remember all this information!

It is easy to forget key facts when under pressure in an interview. It is also very different knowing something, or thinking you know something, and delivering it correctly, and powerfully, verbally. Here are our top three tips to help you:

- Write down your 'top three' pieces of knowledge. Check you have got them absolutely correct. Take them on a card to the interview in note form; do not write out whole sentences as you will sound wooden reading them. Be determined to get these pieces of knowledge into your interview.

- Make your top three facts powerful. Relate your facts to periods of time, for example. Make powerful analogies. For example 'Every week X people die on roads. That's the equivalent of a jumbo jet crashing over our region every week killing everyone on board. That just wouldn't be tolerated, and neither should road deaths. We must act.'
- Keep it simple. Avoid complex information containing multiple statistics and percentages that you could easily mess up, and that the listening public will find hard to understand. For example, some people don't understand percentages. For example, it is not a good idea to say: 'X% of drink drivers are female but only X% of those female drink drivers drink more than X units.' *Better to say: 'We know that 1 in X drink drivers are women, but we also know they drink significantly less and cause less deaths than men.'

As you get better at interviews, you may find you can convey more information in long interviews, but be aware that the public will only retain some information and there is a possibility of information overload.

1.3 What should be done about the problem?

As well as explaining the problem, you have to demand action, and be able to articulate what that action must be. If you don't, you aren't doing your job as a campaigner! You should think about three things:

- **What the public can do.** For example, sticking with the subject of drink driving, drivers could commit to never drinking a drop and driving; communities could 'shop' known drink drivers to the police; parents could offer to give their teenagers lifts rather than them risk drink driving; teenagers could pledge to always designate a sober driver, and never get in a car with a drunk driver.
- **What the central government and other more local public agencies should do.** For example, and again sticking with the subject of drink driving, central government could *regulate* by lowering the drink drive limit, allowing random drink drive checks, making penalties for drink driving tougher, and making education about drink driving compulsory in schools. They could invest more by giving more money for traffic enforcement by police and spending more on television advertising.
- What Brake is doing, and how the public can get involved with the charity. Promote our website www.brakecharity.org Mentioning the word Brake helps us raise our profile and enables people to access our services and campaigns.

2. DELIVERY

2.1 OK, I know what I want to say, but will I be able to say it 'on the night'?

If you are an eloquent orator, and regularly practice your oratory skills in a public arena, then you are likely to be good at doing interviews. For example, if you chair committees, or teach or lecture in any capacity, then you have a head start on other people. However, if you don't talk publicly for professional reasons, you will already know if you can 'hold an audience' through your social and family life. To help you become great at interviews, try talking more, socially, on topics that require you to passionately act as an advocate for something. Debate things with your family that you hear on the radio or TV. Use the techniques listed in 2.2 and below when you do this debating.

2.2 Three top tips to help you be a better speaker

- **Use the clearest language** that will be understood by the most people. Bear in mind your interview is being listened to by people who might have a baby screaming in their ear, or a kettle whistling, or not have English as their first language. Avoid jargon like the plague. Use simple words rather than complex words that can be misinterpreted or that you might stumble over or that sound euphemistic and therefore are not as powerful. For example, always say deaths NOT 'fatal injuries'.

- **Use the correct language.** For example, if you are talking about deaths, then you can't say casualties. 'Casualties' means deaths and injuries. Anyway, it is better to say deaths and injuries than the confusing and euphemistic word casualties. It is never acceptable to be sloppy about your meaning; it discredits you. Keeping your information simple (see above) will help you to get it right under pressure. Never use the word accident; it is offensive to many bereaved and injured families. Use the word crash. It is more accurate and shorter.
- **Practice** saying your top three pieces of knowledge to a family member, friend or to yourself somewhere private, using the language you have chosen. You may feel embarrassed, but better to make mistakes in private, than when broadcasting. Practice makes perfect *(see further down).

2.3 Pre-record and live: the differences

If you are new to interviews, it is easiest to start with pre-records. These are interviews that are recorded in advance, and broadcast later. The main advantage for beginners is that if you mess up an answer, or forget to say something critical, you can ask for the opportunity to start/do it again. Be proactive not shy; ask to do it again, and again, if necessary, until you get it right and to your satisfaction. British Labour politician John Prescott famously once asked a television crew if he could do an answer again to be told 'no Mr Prescott, this is live!'; so make sure you know for sure whether the interview you are doing is pre-record or live.

If your interview is live, it is being broadcast as you speak. To help you prepare, particularly if you are nervous, ask the interviewer or the producer you are talking to before you go live to tell you the first question. That way, you can be prepared and start the interview strongly with a well-planned answer.

2.4 Length of answer

The flow of interviews is as follows: question, answer, question, answer, question, answer. That might sound terribly obvious, but it begs one vital question; how long should you speak before 'handing back' to the interviewer? It is critical to give more or less the 'right length' of answer, and this will depend on the question but also the medium. A few different mediums are listed below, as examples.

- A live television interview in a studio, on a sofa, for the local evening news
- A mid-morning radio chat show about the issues of the day
- A pre-recorded interview for a 'drive time' radio news programme
- A pre-recorded television interview for a documentary about road safety

Generally, the longer your slot on the programme, the longer your answers can be. Therefore it is important in advance of being recorded that you ascertain the likely length of your slot.

The correct length is never a one-word answer such as 'yes' or 'no'! The correct length will vary between a single, strong, 'sound bite' that could easily be used in a pre-record for a tight, short news report, to several sentences listing several points, ideal for a lengthy more conversational piece, perhaps on a mid morning chat show. The only way to learn the correct length is to listen and watch interviews in the media that you are aiming to be broadcast on.

Listening and watching the media is essential to help you improve your technique and performance.

2.5 Speed of answer

Most people find they have to force themselves to talk much slower than they find normal to do an effective interview. This is for two main reasons. Firstly, if you talk fast, your brain might not, literally, be able to keep up with your mouth. You will find your sentence rambling and ending mid-air, without a planned finish. This is very embarrassing and difficult to recover from. Better to slow down, and be able to finish coherently. Secondly, if you talk fast, people won't catch all your points. Better to slow down and talk emphatically, with emphasis on particularly important words. Think

about great speakers of our time: Winston Churchill, for example, or Martin Luther King. Famous speakers usually talk slowly.

2.6 Find your rhythm and use lists

Being a good orator isn't just about speed. Like music and poetry, it's also about rhythm. The interviewer and the audience need to be able to understand whether you are at the beginning, in the middle, or at the end of your answer. One way to find your rhythm in an answer is to list. For example, 'There are three things the public can do to combat drink drivers: firstly, watch out for drink drivers in your community and shop them anonymously to the police; secondly, never drink a drop before driving; any amount of alcohol makes you a worse driver and it's almost impossible to know how much you have drunk; and thirdly, email your member of parliament and ask them to campaign for a lower drink drive limit. Our drink drive limit is significantly higher than other countries and this is shocking and unacceptable. If people do these three things, we can save X lives every week caused by the evil that is drink driving.'

If you list like this, the interviewer cannot cut across you, as it is obvious you are in the middle of your answer. By saying at the beginning of your answer that you are going to say three things means you are 'staking your claim' to air time and it is almost impossible for you then to be interrupted until you have said these things. Aim to have at least one list in every interview you do; they are great for getting lots of points across that tick all your boxes regarding your objectives for the interview. Note, for example, that the above answer educates the public, but also calls on the public to campaign for change in line with a Brake policy point, and also gets a key statistic across to demonstrate the extent of the problem.

There is one significant danger to listing; you get stuck mid list and can't think of anything else to list! The solution is to only list three things. It is possible, if you are talking slowly, and are fairly experienced, to start your list only knowing the first one or two things you are going to list, and then to think, as you list, what the second or third things will be. But it is much harder to list if you don't restrict your list to three points. You will run out of steam before you finish. Also, if you list more than three things, the listening public is less likely to remember them anyway.

2.7 Pauses and 'umms'

Contrary to some opinions, it is absolutely fine to pause for a short while or say 'umm'. While it isn't a sign of an extremely experienced interviewee, and not advisable to do it in every answer, it is much, much better to pause or say umm than to say the wrong thing or stumble over your words. Pausing or saying umm can, in fact, demonstrate to the listener that you are thinking, rather than just filling air space with rubbish. It is particularly acceptable to pause before you start to give your answer, rather than fill air space with rubbish such as 'Oooh I'm not sure about that one, let me think?'. Again, if you are talking slowly, it will not sound strange if you occasionally say umm or pause for effect (or just to think what you are going to say). Never apologise in the middle of a live interview for not having anything to say; much better to pause and collect your thoughts. Ensure your pauses are short.

2.8 Varying your answer

You might not know it, but there might be words that you over-use all the time and that would be irritating to the close listener if they heard it all the time. You might, for example, regularly use particular emphasis words repetitively, such as saying things are 'really' this or that, or 'absolutely' this or that. Often such words are unnecessary and you must try to edit them out from your professional 'voice'. Avoid like the plague modern youth language such as 'kinda like'; it is sloppy and unprofessional. Use your 'inner critic' to find out what your language ticks are, and ask your family or friends; they'll tell you!

2.9 Repeating the question

If you are doing a pre-record for a tight news programme, there is a good chance that the interviewer will 'cut' their questions and use your answers as 'sound bites' on their own. In this case, it is a good idea to start your answer with

the question. For example, if an interviewer asks 'Are drink drivers the biggest danger on Britain's roads?' you could answer: 'Drink drivers are one of the biggest dangers on Britain's roads' and then move on to give some facts and get some points across. Be aware of the addition of the word 'one' into this answer, making a factually incorrect question into a factually correct answer.

Conversely, if you are doing a live interview, it will sound silly if you repeat the question all the time. However, if you need some time to think, repeating the concept in one or two questions can help you to buy this thinking time.

2.10 Making a mistake and correcting it

If you make a mistake, you will usually realise it straight away. If you do, correct it straight away. Better to correct it than to leave it uncorrected. The listener won't think any worse of you; they will appreciate you are human, and it will demonstrate to them that you care about accuracy. Bear in mind that if you talk too fast (see above) it is much easier to make mistakes, and much harder to notice when you have made them!

2.11 You don't win points for agreeing with the interviewer

The objective in an interview is to get your points across to the listener, not to make friends with the interviewer. If the interviewer asserts something, it is not your job to unthinkingly agree with that statement. For example, an interviewer might say: 'I hear what you are saying about drink drivers, but what about drunk pedestrians? They are just as dangerous and cause crashes.' In this case, an inexperienced interviewee would agree and find it difficult to debate the point. An experienced interviewee would say: 'A drunk pedestrian doesn't deserve the death penalty. Drivers are the ones with the killing weapon - a car. At night, when drunk pedestrians are about, and they are harder to spot because it is dark, it is up to drivers to drive even more carefully and slowly, and completely sober.' In other words, when you are sent a wide ball that distracts from the main point or diverts blame in an inappropriate way, bring it back to the subject quickly.

2.12 What if I am asked a personal question that I don't want to answer?

It is common to be asked questions that are personal, particularly in discursive, radio interviews. If there is anything in particular you are not prepared to talk about (for example, a bereavement you have suffered in a road crash, or some aspect of a bereavement you have suffered) then get agreement with the programme in advance that this will not be talked about. You may need to re-agree this just before you do your interview, as some things can be forgotten in the run up to an interview, or not passed on by a producer or researcher to the person who is conducting the interview. If you are still asked about it in a live interview, it is acceptable to say 'We agreed in advance that we wouldn't talk about this today.'

There are some personal questions that are just silly, irrelevant, and wasting your valuable air time. For example: 'What colour car do you drive?' If you are asked a daft question like this, you are justified in bringing the interview straight back to the topic, assertively: 'I'm not here to talk about the colour of my car, I'm here to talk about the X number of people killed on roads every day and how to stop these tragic, appalling deaths.....' and then lead straight into a powerful point about the subject of the interview. It will then be nigh-on impossible for the interviewer to re-ask the silly question without looking even more silly. If they do re-ask the silly question, keep refusing to answer it.

Don't answer any question that requires you to give away personal information that could compromise you in a way you do not wish to be compromised, for example, information about any children you have.

2.13 Your driving behaviour

It is common to be asked questions about your driving behaviour. It perhaps goes without saying, but needs to be said, that you should not do interviews about road safety if you are yourself a convicted offender, unless you are happy to talk up front and will do so about your offences and how you are reformed, and why. Otherwise, you will be

'found out' and it would be a case of the 'pot calling the kettle black'. The most common question is 'Do you speed/drink drive/ etc.' It is vital that you can confidently and truthfully answer 'no' to such questions. If you can't, you shouldn't be doing road safety interviews. For example, if an interviewer said: *'I bet you creep over the limit just like everyone else'*, you should be able to answer: **No. And actually there are many people who do not break speed limits. If I'm not sure what the limit is, I drive under the slowest limit that it could be. I also drive as little as possible to minimise the risk further. I'm constantly aware of my speed because I'm constantly aware of the devastating consequence of speed; deaths, brain injury and paralysis. My advice to drivers, and Brake's advice, is to watch out for limit signs, watch your speed and know how different speeds 'feel' in your car, and always be aware of the fact that at 35mph you are twice as likely to kill as you are at 30mph.'* Note that in this answer there is a list. This list includes an interesting fact, a 'name drop' for Brake, an important charity that people may wish to contact, and some simple advice for drivers to follow. A challenge to you has been turned into an opportunity to get important points across.

2.14 It's a case of us not them

While it is important that you take the moral high ground and are not a traffic offender, it is also useful to make the audience feel like you are one of them. To do this, you can use the word 'we' effectively. For example, say: 'We all need to think about people being killed on roads and to think about it every time we get in our cars. We all need to hold our children's hands around roads. We all need to..'

2.14 Repetition, repetition, repetition

All great orators use repetition effectively. This doesn't mean overly using small, silly words such as 'kinda like'. It means repeating strong, important words. For example, Churchill's 'We will fight them on the beaches..' speech. Or JFK's 'I have a dream..' speech. Google such speeches and note their techniques. If you look at some of the answers given in this guide you will find effective repetition, but here is another example: **It is totally unacceptable that people continue to drink and drive. It is totally unacceptable that families continue to be bereaved in such terrible circumstances. It is totally unacceptable that the government continues to refuse to lower the drink drive limit. Everyone should contact their MP and demand the drink drive limit is lowered.'* Such repetition helps you; it means you have to think of less words. It also adds emphasis and rhythm (see above).

2.15 Know what you want to say and say it

Your interview is your one shot to get your points across, regardless of the questions you are asked. While you must never completely ignore or evade questions, you can give short answers to less pertinent questions and then go on in the same answer to get your points across that you need to get across. Practice flowing from answering an irrelevant question into getting relevant points across. This is a technique that does need practice.

2.16 Interruptions

If you are interrupted by the interviewer, it can be hard to keep your 'balance'. The best advice is to keep remembering what you wanted to say and to say it. Reclaim the interview as assertively as you can bearing in mind the points in 2.15. If you are told before an interview that you are taking part in a three-way debate with other people and that you can interrupt them, then it is important to try to assert yourself as much as possible in the interview without coming across as a loud mouth or rude. The other interviewees will have been told the same thing and will also be trying to claim the air space. Again, listing can help here.

2.17 Plan your adjectives and analogies

Words can't easily be plucked out of thin air. Plan in advance the 'colour' of your language. Will something be a disgrace? A national outrage? What similes or scenarios will you use? For example: 'In the time it takes to eat your family meal tonight another X families will have been bereaved and there will be a seat empty at their dining room table?' Or 'You wouldn't operate a chain saw while chatting to your mates on a phone, so why do people think it is

acceptable to drive a tonne of metal at 50mph while doing this?' As well as planning, practice saying your adjectives and analogies in advance.

2.18 Be passionate and serious

Road death and injury is a serious topic. If you are feeling too jolly beforehand, you need to compose yourself. If you need to, imagine you are giving your interview to people bereaved and injured in road crashes, or that you are giving your interview standing in a morgue full of road crash victims or in a brain injury ward. While it is OK to give half smiles and wrong to look ferocious, it is inappropriate to grin during a television interview about road death and best to keep a serious face on at all times. This can be harder than you think - poor interviewers can sometimes approach the subject of road safety with great frivolity. You must never succumb and join in with this - stand your ground in terms of the tone you use. If you are giving a TV interview, dress seriously and professionally but noticeably (unless you are wearing a Brake campaign sweatshirt or T shirt). A good combination is a dark suit with a single coloured bright shirt underneath. The dark suit gives you gravity and the bright shirt draws attention to you. Avoid patterns or dominating jewellery as the audience will inevitably be distracted by it.

You have to be passionate. If you come across in a monotone way, people will just be bored by you. To be passionate you need to have an excellent tone that goes up and down and becomes louder and softer. It varies and emphasises. Again, this is about the poetry of your presentation. Practice on others. Record yourself and listen back to yourself. This might make you cringe, but it will help.

2.20 Be yourself!

There are lots of tips in this guide which are vital to follow, but perhaps the most important tip is to be yourself. Don't try to turn yourself into someone else. By having a unique character you will be more believable. If your tendency is to talk calmly and quietly, then you should spend most of your interview doing that. If your tendency is to talk loudly and passionately, then go for it. Both can be effective for different sections of audience.

3. TECHNICAL TIPS

3.1 Outside broadcasts

An outside broadcast or OB is when you are interviewed on the street rather than in a building. These are common on the topic of road safety. If you are doing an outside broadcast for TV you will either be talking to someone who is elsewhere in a studio, or an interviewer who is with you. If you are talking to someone in a studio, then you will be asked to look directly into the camera; this kind of interview is occasionally pre-record but is more often live. Do not divert your eyes from the camera. Be careful not to do this particularly at the beginning or the end of the interview. Keep looking at the camera for an extra few heart beats at the end of the interview rather than looking away straight away.

You will have an ear piece to enable you to hear the interviewer in the studio. It is best to ask for a shaped ear piece; these are less likely to fall out than the plugs that go straight in your ear. If you think your ear piece is wobbly get the crew to fix it securely again for you before you go live.

If you can't hear what is being said in the studio adjust the volume on the battery pack that will be attached to your waist. Make sure you know where this is in advance of the interview and which way is louder and which way is softer. If your ear piece starts to fall out during the interview hold it in with your hand. This looks a lot more professional than if you let it fall out and then have to scrabble around for it and put it back in. If you can't hear a question properly, ask for it to be repeated, even if you are live. If you still can't hear the question, and you are live, give a sensible answer

on the points you want to make: 'I still can't hear you properly, but you are probably asking X. My answer to that is X.' The interviewer will be grateful that you are keeping the interview going in a difficult situation.

If you are talking to an interviewer who is with you, it is likely the interview is pre-record, although this isn't always the case. If you are talking to an interviewer, you must under no circumstances look at the camera. You must look into the eyes of the interviewer. It looks very amateur if your eyes flick to the camera or elsewhere. Keep your eyes locked on to the interviewer, but remember to blink as normal! It is easy to develop a 'caught in the headlights' rabbit look where you don't blink and don't move.

If you are doing an interview outside it is likely to be by a road. Ensure you are doing it in safety, well away from traffic. Ensure the traffic isn't too loud. If you think it is, be assertive; ask if the crew can move the interview a little further away. Alternatively, commit to 'speak up' so your voice will definitely be heard over the traffic. This might give your interview greater emphasis!

Ensure you are appropriately dressed for the British weather. If it is windy, make sure your hair won't fly around. Hair spray and hair clips can be important for women in these conditions. A buttoned-up, sober coat, with a bright, single-colour scarf, is a good look in winter for men and women.

You might be asked to do a 'set up' shot where you walk up and down a street, or over a crossing, for example. Again, ensure you only do things that are safe. Negotiate with the crew if necessary.

3.2 Studio TV interviews

If you are doing an interview in a studio with an interviewer present in the same room, look at the interviewer and never at the camera. Hold your gaze before and after the interview. If you are doing an interview 'straight into camera' with the interviewer somewhere else, then you will have an ear piece and you must look into the camera and not elsewhere. If your interview is taking place on a sofa, plan in advance with care what you are wearing, as the whole of your body will show, including your shoes. Make sure your shoes are clean and polished, therefore!

3.3 Studio radio interviews

Make sure you are talking at the right volume. If you are talking too loudly or the dials are up to high on the sound board you will find yourself 'popping on the p's' which means that whenever you say a word starting in p there will be a crackle, which is off putting to the audience. Often the studio will take a sound check on you; make sure you talk normally during your sound check. When doing a radio interview it is important to remember that the audience cannot see you; so being emphatic and having a powerful tone is very important (see earlier in this guide).

3.4 Body language

If you wave your arms around a lot when you speak you might want to carry on doing this in tv interviews, but a little less energetically. If you don't use your hands when you speak you might find it very unnatural to do so and difficult, so don't worry about it. However, it can help you to emphasise your points a little if you use your hands a little. Avoid swaying side to side or back and forth. You might do this subconsciously. If standing, position your feet a little apart so you feel well 'grounded'. If sat, don't slouch, but don't sit like you have a rod up your back either. Try to keep your shoulders down; if stressed it is common for your shoulders to end up round your ears. Shake your shoulders down before an interview and focus on calm breathing.

3.5 General guidance on dress for women doing TV interviews

Because women have so much choice when it comes to clothing and accessories, it can be hard to know what to wear. Wear what you feel comfortable in, but bear in mind these valuable tips:

- Strong make up can help. It can stop you appearing palid on screen, particularly lipstick;
- Very dangly earrings or large necklaces may be distracting.
- Low cut tops are a bad idea. Something that you think isn't very revealing may appear so on screen, or even make you appear naked if the shot is cut at chest level;
- Hair in front of your eyes must be avoided at all costs - some modern haircuts mean that others can't see your eyes; this makes it appear that you are hiding from something, or even not telling the truth. Pull your hair back using clips or hair spray.

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