

## Lesson Plan

# Shooting a Live Interview

## Project Summary

Shooting a live interview is like real estate. It's all about location, location, location. There are three things that dictate what the right location is for your live interview: story subject, clean audio and engaging visuals. Sounds simple, but many live interviews fail because the production crew ignores one or two, or even all three. In many cases, the crew sacrifices one for the other. They like the look of the shot and ignore the irritating background noise, or they find a quiet place that is either visually boring or has no relevance to the topic of the interview.

It's TV: Both the visuals and audio should reinforce the content.

This lesson plan is a practical exercise that can be done by a group of three students: camera, grip, interviewer -- plus an interviewee. For an outside live interview using natural lighting, figure one hour total. An indoor interview using a light kit will require 15 minutes more for setup.

The live interview should be recorded in camera and then played back later for class review... and perhaps used in a news story, show, or documentary.

- Total Lesson Time - 1 Hour
- Standards: STN B1.3, STN B1.4, STN B1.5, STN B2.1, STN B3.1, STN B3.3, STN B3.4
- Subject/Pathway/Industry
  - A/V Technology & Film Career Pathway (CTE)
  - Broadcast Journalism

## Project Outline

### **DETERMINE PROPER LOCATION EDITORIALY**

The interview crew needs to decide a general location that is editorially relevant to the interview. If the interview is with an equipment manager for the team, then locker room or

sideline would be possible considerations – as opposed to an indistinct hallway or parking lot. If the organizer for an upcoming school carnival is being interviewed, find a background that makes sense from a content point-of-view. In this case, perhaps the prep room (where displays and equipment are being assembled) or where the actual carnival will be. A nearby sidewalk just outside the school because “we really don’t want to walk that far” is not a good option.

Sometimes the right location is time sensitive – a football field at 11 a.m. that is empty isn’t as good as a football field at 4 p.m. when practice is taking place. Conversely, just outside the science lab might not be a great location during the noon hour because that’s during lunch period and that hallway is very noisy during that time. While the exact location usually cannot be determined until the crew shows up, the general location can and should be.

### **PLACE THE CAMERA FOR INTERESTING VISUAL**

First, determine where your main light source is. For an outside live shot, where is the sun? The sun needs to be in front (or at least to the side) of the interview – NOT behind the interviewee. If you are in a room with large windows, make sure the light from the windows is not backlighting your interviewee.

Second, find the most interesting background for your interview subject. If it’s the football coach you’re interviewing, then perhaps the football field, especially if players are warming up behind the coach. Or is it prior to a big game and the bleachers are already packed? Then the bleachers are a fine backdrop. Or the ticket office. Something in the background should be relevant to the interview taking place.

If you’re doing a live interview inside with head of the carnival committee, and you’ve determined the location should be the gym (where the carnival will be held later that week), then make sure the background is not dark. We need to see the gym – not a reporter and interview standing in front of a dark black hole that is the gym.

Whatever you do – **DO NOT** line up the interview with a wall close behind him/her. A wall likely says nothing about the subject of your story. And it’s visually boring. If the only place you can set up is in a hallway, shoot down the length of the hallway, not up against the cinderblock wall.

Camera should be at eye-level – unless there’s a really good reason not to (for instance, camera is slightly higher in the bleachers than interviewee so that homecoming floats can be seen on the track below).

### **I’M SORRY, I COULDN’T HEAR YOU... DID YOU SAY KEAN AUDIO?**

Clean audio. Meaning if the marching band is warming up on the football field, seeing (and hearing) the band in the background is fine, and in fact helps bring the viewer into the scene, but the interview needs to be far enough way so the tuba does not drown out what the coach is saying.

If students decide the prep room for the carnival was a good looking place for the interview, but halfway through setup the HVAC system turns and the blower is really loud or the very creaky school elevator is next door, or the lawn mower and weed whacker are right outside, then turn off the HVAC, put an “Out of Order” sign on the elevator, ask the maintenance crew to go elsewhere -- or YOU go elsewhere. It doesn’t matter how good the carnival spokesperson is, if there’s a mechanical noise whining in the background, your interview will be a bust. Don’t make it hard for your audience to pay attention.

Many live interviews are done with a single handheld microphone. That’s fine. It’s even desirable if you are in a slightly noisy location (before the football game). The directional handheld mic is your best tool in that case. If, however, you are using lavalier microphones, because you prefer that look, remember lav mics are omni-directional -- make sure the background noise will not be too high. Better to have a handheld mic and clean audio than a “good look” with the lavalier mics and less-than-good audio.

Headphones are necessary to properly determine if background noise is acceptable. Your bare ears will pick up sound differently than a directional handheld mic or lav mic. Always use headphones.

### **A FEW MORE TIPS**

Presuming interviewer is using a handheld microphone, the interviewer always holds the microphone. The reporter should tell the interviewee this beforehand (“Don’t worry about grabbing the mic, I’ll take care of that”). This reduces the chance of mic noise in the handoff,

let alone it keeps the reporter in control of the interview. If the principal keeps droning on, for instance, the student reporter can simply pull the microphone with a polite “thank you very much” and then wrap up the interview. Your viewers will thank you very much that you did.

A profile shot is not an interesting interview shot. Who wants to look at the interviewee’s ear? We want to see her/his eyes (and the expression on their face). At the very beginning of the live interview, the interviewer is standing next to the interviewee. The interviewer is often addressing the camera and audience with a short setup (“There are going to be 33 parade floats this Homecoming and this is where many of the floats for are made ...”) When the interviewer then introduces the interviewee, the interviewer should take a slight step towards the camera as she/he turns toward the interviewee. That way, when the interviewee looks at the interviewer, the interviewee is not in profile but is more 3/4 ... not dissimilar to a typical interview shot. Yes, we’re not seeing the interviewer particularly well, but they shouldn’t be the focus – the audience should be looking at the interviewee. After the interviewee finishes, the interviewer spins back towards the camera and wraps it up.

The camera can also “cheat” a bit by not being exactly centered in front of the interviewer and interviewee but being slightly aligned towards the interviewer. That way, once the interviewer turns towards the interviewee (and takes the small step forward), the camera is shooting slightly over the shoulder of the interviewer and has a better angle on the interviewee’s face.

If something interesting is happening in the background during the interview (say the marching band just started to warm up), then the interviewer should reference that. “We can hear the band starting to warm up so I know you need to get going soon, but before you leave, can I ask you ...” Sometimes when you ignore what’s going on in the background, it seems like you’re not paying attention. There’s no easy rule about when to ignore and not ignore – just be aware you do have the option to comment on what the viewer is hearing/seeing.

During the interview, the crew should not be moving/wandering around. It’s hard to do a live interview (both the interviewer and interviewee) with a grip walking around, checking his phone, waving to friends, or starting to pack up unused equipment. Everyone’s focus should be on what is happening on camera at that moment.

For almost any interview, the most important thing viewers see in the frame is the interviewee – so your lighting plan should reflect that. For indoor live shots, consult any resource on tips for 3 point lighting.

Keep in mind the background needs to be relatively well lit, too. That may mean throwing an extra light or two on the background.

For daytime outdoor live interviews, lighting is usually not needed. That said, a light reflector is often a nice touch. You don't have control of the sun or clouds but you can somewhat control their changing effects on your interviewee's face. How many times is the sun directly overhead – making for harsh (and unflattering) lighting conditions? Or the sun pops out from behind the clouds? A reflector is an easy (and cheap) tool. A large piece of white cardboard also works. And if the live interview is at night, say, at the football game, and the background is brightly lit, then you'll need to bring lights to make sure your interviewee is properly lit.

## Resources & Equipment

1. Camera
2. Tripod
3. Light kit or reflector (if available)
4. Handheld mic or lavalier mics
5. Headphones

## Industry Testimony

*"I think journalism gets measured by the quality of information it presents, not the drama or the pyrotechnics associated with us."*

**- Bob Woodward, Investigative Journalist**

## Assessment

1. Did the background make editorial sense?
2. Did the background add any interesting (visual information) to the interview?
3. Was the camera eye level?
4. Was the camera steady?
5. Was the audio clean?
6. Was the microphone choice (handheld or lav) appropriate for the circumstances?
7. If using a handheld mic, did the interviewer maintain control?
8. Was the interviewee pleasingly lit?
9. Was the interviewee's face mostly seen (3/4) or was it in profile?

## Contact

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