

Helpful hints for Video Taping Interviews

The History Channel

By Nancy DuBuc

1. Being able to hear your subject is very important. The camera's microphone is very sensitive. Be careful that noises around you, both near and far, don't interfere. For example, if you are outside, you don't want to hear traffic noises or your friends playing. Make sure that all televisions and radios are off if you record inside a home.
2. Don't ask your subject(s) "yes" and "no" questions. Your tape will be more interesting if you think of questions that encourage people to describe a scene, location, event or another person. For example, use phrases like, "what were you thinking when" or "please describe what it was like to..." When you ask your questions make sure you speak clearly.
3. Prepare your question before you meet with your interview subject. Let your subject know what types of questions you'll be asking. They can start remembering their experiences before they meet with you and maybe even think of some stories they might like to tell that you wouldn't have asked about. You might think of new questions as the interview progresses. Your list of prepared questions should be used as a guide.
4. When interviewing a person, think about what you want them to look at. Directly into the camera's lens, at you or off to the side? Try a couple of tests with a friend to see what you like best.

5. If you're going to be in the scene your subject should be talking to you. If you plan on being behind the camera, try setting the camera on a table or a tripod (if available). Sit directly next to the camera when interviewing your subject, that way they can talk directly to you instead of to the camera.
6. Give your subject a glass of water. After a lot of talking their voice may become scratchy or strained and it's fine to take a sip of water while the camera is rolling.
7. Lighting is important because you don't want your subject to look too dark or too bright.
 - If you shoot outside, make sure the sun is behind you (the camera).
 - Inside, don't shoot in front of a window. It will look overexposed, or bright.
 - A bright light next to your subject is also troublesome.
 - When shooting a person wearing a white shirt don't seat them in front of a white background or their face will look very dark.
8. Charge your batteries before you begin shooting and double check that the charge worked! You don't want to have to stop an interview halfway through because of a dead battery. If you have an extra battery it's a good idea to charge it, as a precaution. Plenty of tape is a good idea too. You don't want to stop the interview because you're out of tape.
9. To prevent accidental erasure of your tape, there is a tab on the tape that can be slid to the side to show a red mark. We recommend you do this when not shooting. If you want to shoot again, simply slide the tab over and begin. If you are using a

VHS tape the tab needs to be broken off. To record again, a simple piece of scotch tape over the hole will do the trick! Make sure you label your tape. This will let you and others know it's something special.

10. Make sure you start your tape from the beginning. We don't want to see any family videos, along with your WW II story, unless of course they're family videos of WW II! Allow the tape to play for about fifteen seconds before recording. We don't want to miss the beginning of any scene.
11. Keeping the camera steady is very important. If you move around too quickly or get too close to the subject, your picture may be out of focus. Depending on what you are shooting, try standing about one to four feet away from your subject(s). For larger subjects you will need to be farther away and for smaller subjects try and be a little closer. Practice before you do too much shooting
12. Double-check that you are recording. A lot of cameras have a stand-by switch, be careful you're not accidentally in this mode.
13. Last but not least, make sure your lens cap is off! And remember to have fun!