

“HarveyLeach”

**A**  
**spokesperson's**  
**guide to**  
**television**  
**interview**  
**formats**

# About the authors



## Andrew Harvey

Andrew has spent the last 30 years presenting the main TV news programmes on BBC and ITN. He is one of the very few presenters to have fronted all the BBC's daily news programmes.

For ITN he was the lead presenter, fronting live coverage of stories ranging from the London terrorist attacks in July 2005 to the Queen Mother's funeral.

He has worked as a media trainer for 20 years.



## Graham Leach

Graham has spent 30 years working in broadcast news.

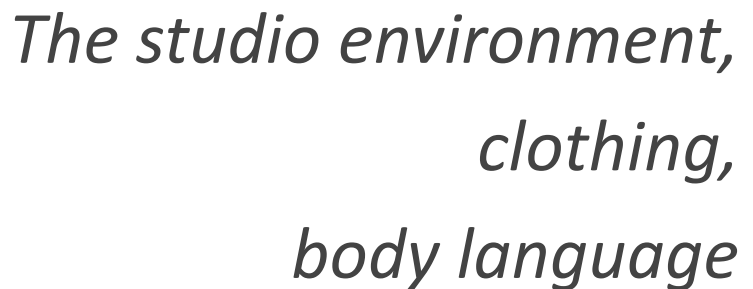
He spent 17 years travelling the world as a BBC foreign correspondent with postings in Bonn, Beirut, Johannesburg and Brussels.

He has presented the flagship 'Today' programme and most recently worked on the Sky News channel. He has been involved in media training for 15 years.

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# The one-to-one interview



# **The one-to-one interview**

More often than not a face-to-face interview will take place in a television news studio. You may well find yourself sitting at the same desk as the presenter of the programme.

Studios – and the adjacent newsrooms – can be very busy places. Lots of people are running around with seeming disregard for you. Don't be intimidated by this. Presenters, producers, technicians are frequently preoccupied. There's a lot going on at once. Their apparent indifference towards you when you turn up is not a sign that they don't value your contribution to the programme. Rather, they are pleased you have arrived, but now need to get on with other things to keep the programme on the air.

# **The one-to-one interview**

In the studio, remember that distraction is the great enemy of a good interview. It doesn't take much for the viewer to be diverted from what you're saying.

Avoid 'loud' clothes, check-patterned jackets that 'strobe', excessive jewellery.

Don't wave your hands around all the time. The television screen can absorb only so much movement before you start looking like a whirling dervish!

Maintain a steady 'eyeline' to the interviewer. Eye contact is paramount in television interviews. An interviewee who's looking everywhere but at the interviewer is an interviewee not to be trusted.

# The one-to-one interview

By all means look down occasionally – a pause for thought, as it were – but don't glance nervously all over the studio.

Never look at the ceiling – it smacks of searching for divine inspiration!

Try not to take notes in with you. It can look as though you don't know your subject properly or that somebody else has written a brief for you.

Be aware that the camera might be trained on you before the interview gets underway – so get settled in your chair swiftly once you have been seated by the floor manager. At the end, stay put and continue to look at the interviewer until you are asked to leave the studio.

## The soundbite interview



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## **The soundbite interview**

This is a completely different format to the ‘one-to-one’ interview.

Here, you’ll most likely be interviewed by a television news reporter rather than a studio presenter.

That’s because the reporter wants to include you in a report or news ‘package’. The package will comprise several different elements – footage of the news event that’s being covered, commentary or ‘track’ from the reporter (the voice behind the pictures), one or two ‘soundbites’ from the key players involved in the story, maybe a couple of voxpops (short mini-reactions from members of the public) and a ‘piece-to-camera’ or ‘stand-upper’ by the reporter.

## **The soundbite interview**

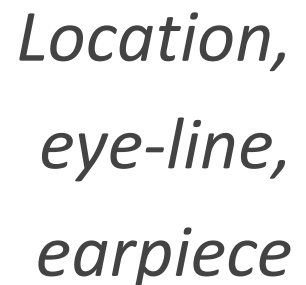
The reporter will interview you and then choose one of your answers for a soundbite in his or her news package. This gives the reporter immense editorial control.

Remember it is generally only one answer that the reporter will choose.

That means you need to repeat your key message(s) in each answer, after responding very briefly to the immediate question put to you. That way you are almost guaranteed to ensure that what you want to say ends up in the package that's broadcast.

Leave out phrases like, "As I said", or "again" – remember, only one answer will be used, not the whole interview.

## The down-the-line interview



## **The down-the-line interview**

The down-the-line format can take place in a small, purpose-built 'remote' studio or outside in the open air.

If you are in a purpose-built 'booth', you will find instructions about contacting the main studio. You might have to switch everything on when you arrive and off when you leave, never seeing another person.

You may be advised by a technician where to look. If not, ensure your eye-line is to the upper half of the camera lens or just above the lens hood. Try to keep your eye-line steady throughout the interview.

## **The down-the-line interview**

If the camera is operated remotely don't be surprised when it springs into action and 'frames' you ready for the programme. You need to get settled in a comfortable sitting position (or standing position, if outside) ready for the interview. Once the interview starts, the camera cannot be adjusted.

You will not see the person who will interview you. Either before you arrive or by phone to the main studio, check who is conducting the interview.

It is your choice which ear the earpiece goes in. It may be feel uncomfortable at first and likely to fall out. Should it fall out during the interview, try to replace it or hold it in place with your hand and continue. Make sure you can hear properly before the interview begins.

## **The down-the-line interview**

Once the pre-interview technical checks have been made, the earpiece will be 'fed' the programme sound. Sit still and keep a steady eye-line to the camera as your image may be 'fed' into the studio programme in advance of your interview. So consider yourself 'on air' once you sit in the chair.

When the interview is over, stay still until you are told you are 'off air'. Don't jump up immediately when you think the interview is over. Wait for a 'clear' from the studio via your earpiece.

# CHAPTER 4:

## The live link interview



*On the scene,  
the reporter,  
where to look*

## **The live link interview**

This is where television news programmes like to demonstrate that they've got their man or woman on the scene, on top of the story.

The programme wants to interview you from an outside location. It's quite possible to do this using the 'down-the-line' format - just you linked up by earpiece to the presenter.

Where there's an unfolding news event, however, the presenter might instead 'throw' to the reporter on the spot, who could be standing next to you. He or she might then give a short summary of what's happened and then interview you yourselves.



## **The live link interview**

You might be 'in shot' while the reporter's speaking. So don't stargaze! Keep looking at the reporter.

After their introduction, the reporter will move to stand next to the camera so that they are facing you. Keep looking at the interviewer.

At the end of the interview the reporter will move back to their original position alongside you to 'throw back' to the studio. Again, hold your eye-line to the reporter. Don't start looking for where the next interviewer is!

# The doorstep interview



*Ground rules,  
keep calm,  
draw to a close*

## The doorstep interview

If you are genuinely taken by surprise, make an excuse to halt proceedings, so you can evaluate the situation and prepare your responses. Explain that you have a meeting to attend and you will return in ten minutes.

If you are door-stepped in the street away from your office, consider inviting the journalist(s) to another venue for a more formal meeting. Give any reason: traffic noise, weather conditions etc.

Lay down some ground rules: “Ladies and gentlemen, let me explain what has happened, then I shall be happy to take some questions...”

# The doorstep interview

Deliver the information you want first and do not allow interruptions. Remain calm and tell the journalists you are happy to answer their questions, but gain time by setting an incident in context.

Don't be drawn into the pace and urgency of their questions. Set your own pace and stick to your agenda.

Be seen to be helpful and open. Take a number of questions and ask journalists to identify themselves as they ask questions.

It is normal to be asked the same or similar questions by different news stations. Simply repeat your response to each one.

# The doorstep interview

Offer to keep journalists informed as events unfold.

Don't stay too long, and draw proceedings to a close politely but firmly.

When you have said you will go, then go.

# The news conference



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# The news conference

Before you address the journalists, decide how long you want the news conference to last. If left to their own devices, journalists will drag it out. The longer it goes on, the more chance there is of you saying something you'll later regret.

Be aware that you are in view of the audience or the 'live' cameras the moment you enter the room. Shuffling in apologetically, looking disorganised or nervous will not create a good impression

When you appear, wait for any hubbub to subside and then announce your name and job title.

# The news conference

Lay down the ground rules. That means telling the journalists that you have a statement to read out, after which you will take questions. Let them know how many questions you are prepared to take. It's essential that you complete your statement, whatever the interruptions. Deal with interruptions firmly but courteously.

At the end of your statement, re-state the ground rules. Something like this might work: "That concludes my statement, I'm now happy to take three or four questions."

Take a number of questions and ask journalists to introduce themselves as they ask their questions.



# The news conference

Repeat responses to repeated questions. If the answer is right for Sky it is right for the BBC and local radio.

Never get angry with a journalist. Millions could be watching. If you lose the plot, that's the first sign you're guilty or feeling under pressure.

Choose the questioners – otherwise it can quickly turn into a chaotic free-for-all.

At the end, wrap things up briskly.

# **Request a tailored media training programme and quotation**

If you are interested in the  
most effective media training  
for your spokespeople,  
[request a training  
programme and quotation](#)  
based on your requirements.