



- Find an **appropriate background** to shoot against that says something about the interviewee. Make sure there are no distracting background visuals or noises. Try to position the person as far as possible from the background so it will be slightly out of focus.



Simple background that says something about the subject's environment



Simple, out of focus background does not distract from subject



Cluttered background distracts from subject; boring composition

- Don't take up the interviewee's time with **setting up**. Use a stand-in while you decide where to set up your camera, test microphones, and position any extra lights you might be using.
- Interviewees need to know **where to look**. Decide ahead of time if you want them to look straight into the camera, which will be more emotional, or slightly to the side of the camera (probably where you are sitting), which produces a more detached feeling. **BE CONSISTENT** throughout all the interviews that will be in one program, e.g., don't show one person looking straight at the camera and another looking off to the side.
- Composition**: the interviewee should be on one side of the center of the frame and facing in toward the middle (the "Rule of Thirds" for good composition).
- It's a good idea **not to talk at length** to a potential interviewee beforehand. If you do, the interview will probably come across as forced and unnatural because the subject will be repeating information they have just told you.
- Don't make the subject sit in a position that is **uncomfortable** for them, because they will probably move later and mess up the shot.
- Get the interviewee to **say their name and phone number/address** at the beginning/end of an interview. This will ensure they can be contacted later and help you when you are creating captions. If their name is an unusual one get them to spell it. Also, have them sign any **RELEASE FORMS** you need before the interview starts.
- Don't ask "yes or no" questions**. The answers will be too short and unusable. Stick to "why" and "how" questions.



Subject looking into camera; Erroll Morris uses this technique effectively



Obeying the Rule of Thirds for composition

This project is supported in part by a grant from Texas Commission on the Arts

WORKSHEET

Interviewing Strategies



TEXAS ARCHIVE
OF THE MOVING IMAGE

- If the interviewer is not going to be in the final program, make sure that all answers in the interview will ‘stand alone,’ so that questions can be removed without the meaning of the answer being lost. Ask open-ended questions like: “talk to me about why you’re here,” or “please explain some more about that.” Always listen to the start of the answer very carefully. If your interviewee starts off in a way that will not stand alone, e.g. “Well we did that because of the alien spaceship...” then politely stop them and give a hint as to how you want them to start: “We jumped off the road because an alien spaceship suddenly appeared.”
- During the interview think about whether **zoom** needs to be changed (e.g., when a story becomes very emotional). It may be necessary to re-ask the question after this. If you cannot redo it, either zoom smoothly and slowly (so you can keep the zoom when editing) or zoom really fast (so a cutaway can be inserted over the zoom in editing).



Use extreme close-ups for very important or emotional answers, even if you have to ask the subject to repeat the answer after you reframe the shot

- For very important answers, **shoot several different types of shots**, e.g., shoot the answer in a medium shot and then have them repeat the answer after you set up an extreme closeup.
- Be very aware of possible **background distractions**, and be **ready to stop recording** when they happen. For example, if a noisy airplane flies over or someone makes funny faces in the background, you should stop recording and ask the last question again. It is best not to have people walking around in the background unless this adds to the atmosphere of the piece.
- When the interview is over, **get some b-roll** (cutaways): closeups of the person’s hands, photos on their office walls that might tie in to the interview, anything you can find in the environment that could help support the interview. You will need these shots later to cover your editing, and you may never have the chance get these shots again.

Stills from: *Regret to Inform*, *Hoop Dreams*, and *Fast, Cheap & Out of Control*

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