Conversation set-up
by Larry Engel

Scout the area for the best angles

Consider light
      have ability to fill

Listen for sound problems
      use clip on or directional mic
      if exterior, generally need mic with softie (dead cat)

Check exposure, focus, composition

If using second phone for video, coordinate image size (don't make them the same or too close to one another. Stay on the same side of the axis. Follow the 30º rule.

If using a phone for sound, use Voice Memo app or get free Ferrite. Place the phone as close to the person as you can just below the frame line on the widest composition. Keep it there!

If the person is not going to look directly into the lens ("direct address"), then get the interviewer right next to the lens at the same height of the lens. Frame the person, following rule of thirds. If the person is looking off-screen right, then place them on the left side of the composition. That way you create a strong vector called the sight line. If looking off-screen left, then balance them by placing them on screen right.

The normal procedure for starting to record is that the interviewer or director ask if sound, camera(s) are ready. The crew answers clearly. The director then asks for them to start recording, and they all confirm. Then on with the conversation.

I recommend that you stop recording between answers, so you can cut during the question and start recording just as the interviewer ends their question. Make sure that the subject doesn't step on the interviewer's end of the question and have them take a breath or a beat before starting to answer. This is critical in editing.

Ask the person for their name. Keep it clean and separate just in case you want to use it in your film.

Then ask them to spell their name if necessary.

Get their title.

Get an email address to follow up or send them an announcement as to when the film is complete.

Then with camera rolling, ask them if you have their permission to use the interview, image and sound, in this film (describe maybe working title, subject–just keep it short) and and keep rolling until they say, "Yes."

Then on with the conversation.

Remember not to rush to the next question or follow-up. Give the editor a little space for editing.

Make sure that the person is not looking from eye to eye, from one crew member to another, as you would do naturally in a real conversation. They must only look where directed–either into the lens or at the interviewer. No where else, and not between the two.

At the end of the interview, thank them! Then explain that for editing you need to record what's called room tone, or the natural sound with no one talking. Everyone must be silent. Start recording (only the phone used for sound) and announce that, "This is 30 seconds of room tone for xx location, scene or character."

Remember to spot check to make sure that image and sound are working.

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