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How to shoot an interview for an elearning course

Interviewing a subject matter expert makes it possible to transfer the right know-how to learners of an online course. But how to shoot a good interview?

Often, for an elearning production, it is necessary to interview a subject matter expert.
The expert may be a business manager, a technician, an auditor, or anyone who may be indispensable to transfer the right know-how to your learners in your eLearning course.

In this article, I will transfer to you the basics of how to shoot a good interview for inclusion in your next production so that you have an optimal result for your audience.

Where to start

Filming an interview may not be a simple thing or, at least, it may not be an intuitive process. Essentially, you need to tell a story through the right visuals, choose the right testimonials, and work through a long and nerve-wracking edit in order to create an interesting product with the right pacing.

In this article, we will discuss two techniques that will essentially allow you to bring the work home.

Whenever I had the need to conduct an interview for an eLearning course, a major problem arose: it was not so much a matter of interviewing the experts, but inducing them to tell what we wanted them to tell, to get them to say, in short, what we wanted to hear, what we would include in the final edit.

To achieve this, there are a number of techniques and tips that allow us to get the best out of the people we interview, trying to create a narrative rhythm as close as possible to the pattern we set for ourselves when designing the documentary (we will discuss this in another article).

In a first, simpler case, you can certainly make a "script" or powerpoint that can follow your interviewee. The final effect will be a bit "acted out" but you will have created an initial point of interaction between your audience and the knowledge owner.

Personally, I prefer to interview a person by making their answers natural. I deliver an outline with questions or, if the production allows, you can even go off on a spur of the moment basis.

This is obviously a complex operation that could, if you do not have the right tools, invalidate your work and prevent you from bringing home a satisfactory result.

How then to avoid this?

Identify yourself with the interviewee

Often, when doing this work, we tend to maintain a certain distance, a kind of invisible wall between us and the person with whom we are having a conversation. In this operation, putting ourselves behind the camera does not help at all; on the contrary.

One of the first things to do when preparing for an interview is to study thoroughly the person with whom we will have to relate, to the extent possible, mind you.

Building an empathetic relationship with the person being interviewed serves to better define the story, but more importantly the cultural profile of the person and the goals we want to achieve with the story we are telling.

Whether our interlocutor is an industrialist or a music producer, we should try to get as close as possible to his world, his thinking, his culture.

Have the right amount of curiosity

If you are implementing an eLearning course, especially if driven by a personal interest and budget, it means that you have a great deal of interest and curiosity about your chosen subject.

Although you may already know a good deal about the subject matter, always try to take a step back and...take nothing for granted.

Choose the "no-knowledge" route and learn from the ground up what the interviewees have to teach you. This will generate a series of honest and genuine questions and allow you to create a continuing line in your interviewee's discourse.

If you already demonstrate that you know enough, why would a person tell everything they know for your documentary?

Listen to your interviewee

Although the instructional designer's job is full of tasks to complete, many of them without any outside help, we must not forget that we are there to tell a story but, more importantly, to offer our audience something new and that they do not yet know.

The spirit of discovery must move your interest. If, for example, your interlocutor is talking about topics in a general way, do not be afraid to ask for more specific information such as, "can you give me an example of this thing?" or "how does this thing work in detail?"

Be, in essence, the voice of your audience.

What questions would a student ask in a live class?

Try to have a conversation with your interlocutor without asking a list of anonymous questions with no apparent coordination. During your conversation you will realize that you want to ask many more questions of the person being interviewed, questions that you had never thought to prepare at home or in the studio.

Decide in advance what your narrative basis will be.

When producing an interview for an eLearning course, it is always a good practice to define in advance whether you will have a narrator, voiceover, or graphic reference in your narrative that anticipates the theme or the very question you are asking the interviewee. If not, it is fair to ask the interviewee to give a complete answer.

For example, if the question is, "What was the event that led you to consider an important aspect about cybersecurity?" our respondent's answer in the absence of a narrator will necessarily have to begin like this, "The event that made me consider the importance of protecting our corporate devices is..."

This may seem cumbersome in terms of production, but it will allow, when editing, to create the right conjunctions between topics.

Ask open-ended questions

In general, it is okay to follow the rules of journalism (the classic 5 W's can be found here), but it is important to ask questions in the right way so that the respondent is prevented from answering with a dry "yes" or "no."
For example, try to avoid asking something like "it must have been complicated to attend that event alone..." but ask "how did you think of attending that event alone?" This will increase your chances of getting a personal, information-rich and emotionally valid answer.

Other questions such as "...and then what happened?", "what do you mean by this?", "can you give me an example?", "how did you achieve this?" may be trivial but they fully capture the need to have a conversation with someone.

These questions will make the relationship with the interviewee more natural and less "organized."

Setting instructional design based on interviews

An interview can help create the right rhythm within a course and, certainly, can help increase engagement in the succession of instructional units.

Usually, I tend to take a disruptive approach to an interview, that is, I try to avoid offering it in its entirety within a module.

My advice is to create micro content, accompanied by the keywords found within the subject's answers, and offer it at the moment you want to fix (or introduce) a topic you are covering within the course.

An example of a lineup might be:

- Introduction
- Cyber attacks
- Malware
- Phishing
- Interviewee talking about a case of phishing averted
- And so on...

You'll find yourself creating content that will revolve around expertise and can really add value.

Too often I see interviews within eLearning courses that could be done with a voice-over: they do not add value and present a flat lecture without any "color."

What you need to understand is the need to create useful content and interview people to derive real value from the experience.

Think about having to transfer valuable information that that person can take with them once they retire, what would you ask of them?

We start with the value of the concepts and ask the right questions to transfer knowledge to the users of our courses.