## **Main points from the webinar “In the field - mobile journalism” with James O’Hagan**

## [Young Reporters for the Environment](http://www.yre.global)

***Interviewing***

***Approaching Interviewees***

* Choose your interviewees wisely… there must be a good reason for speaking to them. Are they a true scientific expert? A reliable eye-witness? Someone with a stake in the story?

You’ll find that many people will be happy to do an interview but that doesn’t mean they are the right person for the job.

* There are several types of interview you’ll probably conduct as a reporter:

1. Interviews with people with firsthand knowledge (e.g. experts) or experience (witnesses/stakeholders) of an event or subject who have no reason to mislead you.
2. Interviews with people who have firsthand knowledge or experience of an event or subject but because of their stake in it, they may wish to mislead or ‘spin’ the story because they are biased or subjective.

(c) Interviews with members of the public or officials who have no extra knowledge or expertise but whose opinion you wish to gauge to offer balance or a variety of perspectives.

*Most interviews will be type (a), these require preparation of course but the most challenging interviews are those that fall into the 2nd category. This might be a politician who wants to use your interview to advance his/her interests and avoid being held accountable for their actions. For these interviews you must do a lot of research in advance.*

***Tips for difficult interviews***

* Prepare notes with facts and statistics on the subject that you can use to debunk any misinformation.
* Create a logical sequence for the questions you ask, much like a lawyer would in cross-examining a witness i.e. know what information you want in advance and use the questions to get it.
* Start with easier questions to get your interviewee relaxed
* Take brief notes as they speak in case there’s something you want to come back to (if they contradict themselves for example).
* Imagine the answers in advance and have options prepared for follow up questions.
* Do not let the interviewee control the interview and do not hesitate to politely interrupt them.

**Always listen carefully to the answer and be ready to improvise another question if they say something unexpected.**

*Here’s an example of a very tough interview my friend and colleague Anelise did last year with Nicolas Maduro in Venezuela. If you watch from 24 minutes you see she lets him finish answering and undermines his answer with a simple fact about the value of the currency in the country.*

<https://www.euronews.com/2019/02/14/it-is-not-possible-to-have-two-presidents-in-a-country-nicolas-maduro-speaks-to-euronews>

* For any type of interview, It’s very important to prepare your questions and know exactly what information you need from each person in advance. Long interviews with no focus or angle in mind are the most time-consuming and difficult to edit. In news reporting you don’t have any time to waste!

***Scripting***

**Gathering everything together and scripting**

* Now you have your interviews and footage you can start the process of scripting and editing. You should begin by transcribing the interviews. There are some excellent pieces of software available to do this automatically including trint.com but there can be a cost associated with this. <https://trint.com/>
* Go through your transcription and pull out all the best soundbites you want to use. Timecoding them can be useful so you know where they are in the recording and how long they last.
* Start writing your report. Journalists are taught to summarise the most important or pertinent information their report will cover in the first line (what’s your top line? Is what an editor will ask if you are pitching a story to them). If you read almost any news website you’ll notice this. It’s also a way to draw your reader in and make them want to read/hear/see more.

*For example:*

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/apr/26/why-britains-25-billion-paper-coffee-cups-are-an-eco-disaster>

***Techniques of video reports***

**PIECES TO CAMERA (PTCs)**

* In a video report this topline can take the form of a piece to camera where we see the reporter telling the audience something (in which case you will need to have written beforehand).
* It’s good practice to be showing the viewer something, or be involved in some sort of relevant activity during a PTC, not just standing still talking generally about a subject in a generic setting.

*Example of effective PTCs*

<https://www.euronews.com/2020/03/10/how-mars-might-hold-the-key-to-better-understanding-climate-change>

*An ineffective PTCs*

<https://www.euronews.com/2016/12/13/fluid-glass-in-windows-developed-in-liechtenstein-which-could-provide-an-energy>

**VOICE OVERS (VOs)**

* It can also take the form of a voice-over, in this case you should have a clear idea of what sequence of shots you want to use for the opening before you write it. Get your script timed so your words match up with what we are seeing.

*There are websites to help calculate this like:*

<https://www.edgestudio.com/production/words-to-time-calculator>

* Voice overs are then used to weave your soundbites into a script. You choose a logical order for your soundbites and link them together with short, punchy VO*. I’ll show you the script for my report on ICBA as an example.*
* There are also examples of documentaries filmed entirely on a mobile phone it’s from a series called ‘Unreported Europe’, you can watch it and notice how:

(a) The reporter did not use a piece to camera and it was not necessary.

(b) He uses VO to join the story together and link one person’s statement to another or give pertinent background information. The VOs are often very short… this allows the people you interview to tell the story for you.

<https://www.euronews.com/2020/05/01/inside-europe-s-secret-truck-war-drivers-pay-the-price-for-east-west-divide>

**CUTAWAYS, REVERSES, B ROLL**

In order to cut your interviews seamlessly, there are several important tricks of the trade.

* **‘Cutaways’** are shots of your interviewee or the setting they are in where you do not see their face or they are not speaking and doing some sort of activity. You can use this to cover a cut.
* ‘**Reverses**’ or ‘**noddies**’ are shots of the journalist asking a question or nodding in agreement to an answer. They are used for the same purpose and if you only have one camera, you can ‘cheat’ these after the interview by nodding or asking questions when no-one is actually there!

*N.B Remember the eyeline of your interviewee… make sure it matches. The interviewee always looks at the interviewer NOT THE CAMERA!!*

* **B Roll** is illustrative footage used to ‘paint’ your video report. It is a crucial ingredient which can be filmed on location between interviews or sometimes provided by the interviewee, company or local authority you are covering. Without B roll, your report will be all but impossible to edit.

Although it’s important for the audience to see the interviewee, it can be boring to have a ‘talking head’ for a prolonged period of time. B roll is also used to illustrate what they are talking about and bring the subject to life.

***Live Mobile Reporting***

Just a few years ago, any reporter you saw speaking live on the news would have needed a very expensive satellite truck, a camera operator and perhaps even a sound engineer.

Nowadays most of them have: a smartphone, a tripod, a microphone which connects to the smartphone, an app called Live U and a second mobile phone with a set of headphones.

**How does it work?**

You simply need to:

1. Plug in the microphone

2. Activate the live U app (you can try this with FaceBook live or Instagram live at home!)

3. Frame yourself with a nice background (you can record to check it looks good) <https://www.liveu.tv/>

4. Test the sound (if it goes into the red then it will be distorted)

5. Use your second mobile phone to call the control room (they will give you what’s called an IFB line. This is a number to call which means you can hear the programme and the producer can give you a countdown and any instructions. The gallery will also give you a channel on Live U to activate.

6. You’ll know what questions the presenter will ask in advance so wait for your countdown and you will be live!

Here are some different types of live hit you can do using the same equipment

* **‘Down the line’**: This means you find an interviewee for the presenter to interview directly so you set everything up the same but you do not appear on screen.
* **‘Doughnut’**: This is when the presenter asks you a question, you answer it and then throw to a pre-recorded interview which will be played from the studio’s control room. In this case you must state clearly something like: “ Earlier I spoke to the Prime Minister about emissions targets and THIS IS WHAT HE HAD TO SAY…”

You then listen carefully for the end of the piece and conclude before handing back over to the presenter in the studio. Usually this is done by saying their name for example: “It’s clear that the UK is a long off meeting its obligations under the Paris Agreement and judging by the PM’s comments, the political will to do so is lacking… Rosie… Then you must wait until the producer says ‘Clear’... this means you are no longer visible.

* **A live 2 way:** This is when you have a guest standing out of frame who you bring in to interview in the middle of your hit.

So you would answer one question from the presenter and then say: “joining me for more on that subject is the Minister for the Environment Mrs Bloggs”

Ask him/her several questions and then conclude (NEVER LET A GUEST CONCLUDE).

***Reporting remotely (in times of social distancing)***

Let us imagine that you want to produce a video report about the impact of extreme weather and droughts on Australian wildlife but you cannot afford to go to Australia and film anything yourself and you don’t know anyone there who could help you. What could you do?

1. **Research:** This is a vast subject and not enough research has been done yet for us to fully understand how wildlife has been impacted from this Summer’s devastating heatwaves. Most data remains speculative but that doesn’t mean you can’t approach the subject. Your report could begin with a global overview of the extreme weather events in Australia (i.e. what happened and why) and the latest estimations on their impact:

* The figures on how much land was scorched are already reliable because it is quantifiable and visible through satellite imagery (which is often available to download and use free of charge!) \*\* *Would a satellite image of Australia be a nice image to begin your report with this ‘global overview’?*
* Make sure your data comes from a reliable source (which you should cite).

If you write: *‘It is estimated that 1 billion animals have died as a result of the wildfires’,* you should say where you got that figure from.

*Up to 1 billion animals have died as a result of the wildfires according to Sydney University's Professor Christopher Dickman…*

* Often the information you need will already be available from reputable sources and for these ‘headline figures’ that is all you need. The new information you have discovered and will report on will come from your interviewees.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/11/world/australia/fires-animals.html>

1. **Choosing an angle and getting contributors**: You could then choose to focus in on a case study. You might choose a particular geographical area, animal species or landscape (a river, a forest). Once you’ve done this, you need contributors… so you could make a list of prominent scientists, environmental activists and local authorities quoted in local media; track them down on social media and get in touch with them.

* You can ask them to schedule an interview and use zoom, skype or another video conferencing platform to record them.