

## Phone Interviews

Try to have at least two contact phone numbers for your interviewee – a mobile and a landline.

### **For the best sound quality (in order of preference):**

- Standard phone land-line
- Standard phone going through a switchboard
- Walk-around phone via land-line
- Mobile phone

### **Studio checklist**

Before you ring your interviewee:

- Check the studio to make sure that the microphone and phone line can be heard going into the mixer, and then into the recorder.
- Check that your headphones can hear both your microphone and the phone line.
- Check the microphone is correctly sending audio to the phone line.
- Check to see if the studio has a pre / post button on the channel sending the microphone audio to the phone unit.

If the channel is set to Pre, then even if the fader is turned down the microphone will still be fed to the phone unit. If the fader is set to Post then if the fader is turned down the microphone's sound will not be sent to the phone unit.

### **Get a voice level from the interviewee:**

“I just need to get a voice level from you, can you tell me...

What's the weather like today?

What did you have for breakfast?

*(don't ask something you want them to answer in the actual interview)*

Check their volume level, listen to the clarity of their voice and make sure they can hear you. If you have any concerns about the clarity of the phone line or volume level try calling them back.

### **Some issues you may encounter with phone lines:**

- Phone positions that may cause problems:
  - Phone held under chin (muffled sound)
  - Phone too close to mouth (breathy sound)
  - Phone resting on shoulder (muffled, crackly, rusty sound)
- Low volume level: You may find that going through PABX switchboards will give you a low audio level. Try a direct-dial phone line or mobile number, or get the interviewee to call you.
- Gating: If the interviewee is softly spoken you may find that quiet words are cut or clipped. Often phone lines have “gates” that limit noise by cutting audio below a certain volume threshold. Ask the interviewee to speak up.
- Hiss or interference: If you are hearing hiss, interference or a general fuzzy quality to the phone line ask the interviewee if they are on a cordless walk-around phone. If they are, ask them to move as close as possible to the base unit, or switch to a standard land-line phone.

You may also find a wishy-washy sound with mobile phones if the interviewee is moving about. You could ask your interviewee to stand in one place.

- Echoy sound: Sometimes a long-distance phone call may feature an audio echo of yourself or the interviewee. Try ringing the interviewee back to see if a new phone connection helps.
- Roomy sound: If the interviewee has their phone switched to speaker phone you may find that it sounds like they are sitting in a large room, away from the microphone. Ask them to turn speaker phone off and use a phone handset.
- Dull sound: You may strike random phone lines that are quite dull sounding. This could be result of many factors beyond their control – age of phone, switchboard, country. Try calling the interviewee again, get them to call you, or try another number.
- Tanky sound: generally telephone (telt/hybrid) units will try to limit the amount of your audio coming back through the phone line into the mixing desk.

However sometimes this doesn't happen and you will notice a tanky quality to your voice. This can be lessened by turning down your audio level feeding into the phone unit, or turning down the phone line on the mixing desk when you are speaking.

**If you have a bad line there are a number of things you can try:**

- Equalise: use the equaliser on the mixer to adjust the phone sound. A lot of the sound produced by phone lines is between 1kHz and 5kHz. By adjusting the mid frequencies you will be able to brighten or dull the phone line.
- Call back: You may get a better line simply by calling the interviewee back.
- Call a different number: Try calling the interviewee on a different phone number.
- Get the interviewee to call you: sometimes an incoming call has better sound quality.

**Make sure you tell the interviewee when you start and stop recording**

- There are no visual or audible signals to say when you are recording so it is good practise to let your interviewee know when you start and stop recording.

**To make a call using the Broadcast Host units in the studios:**

- Pickup the studio handset, listen for the dial-tone
- Dial the number
- When it begins ringing press “Call” on the phone unit
- The phone will now be routed through the mixing desk. Speak to your interviewee through the microphone, and listen with headphones plugged into the mixer.
- When you have finished your call press “Drop”, and hang up the handset