

Cam FM Interview Guide

By Callum Fernando – Deputy Station Manager (2016/17)

Cam FM will sometimes offer opportunities to interview musicians, comedians, or other famous figures. If you sign up for one of these, it is important that you are prepared and know how to conduct an interview properly.

This guide will be split into two aspects: TECHNICAL and CONDUCT.

TECHNICAL

Cam FM is a radio station and so we are most concerned with the quality of the recorded audio. If you do manage to film the interview as well that's a massive bonus!

It's important to remember that the quality of the original recording is as good as it's going to get. Any major faults here (recording too quiet/too loud/loud background noise) will be very difficult to salvage later on.

With this in mind:

1. Pick your hardware. A phone can produce a good recording if used in the right way. For better quality consider investing in a better device such as the Zoom H1 which is great for interviews.
2. Make sure you have enough memory and battery on your recorder.
3. Set the gain correctly. This is a pet peeve of mine but this really does dictate whether your interview sounds great or unbearable. You probably cannot do this on a phone but if you are using the Zoom or similar, the gain controls how sensitive the microphone is to sound. It should be set at a level where the recorded audio is neither too quiet, nor too loud.
4. Just like pre-fading in the Cam FM studio, make a test recording. Preferably do this twice, once at home just to see if it's working and once just before the real thing AT YOUR INTERVIEW LOCATION. Make sure to emulate the real interview conditions - this means that you should talk at the same volume and the same distance from the microphone as you will in the real interview. Each time, listen back to the result. Can you hear yourself clearly?
5. Check the background noise. You can only do this while wearing headphones. If the setting you are in is too loud, attempt to relocate the interview.

TOP TIP

Do a test recording with your interviewee in front of you. To check whether your recorder is picking them up properly, do a test. Get them to say:

'I'm _____ and you're listening to Cam FM 97.2'

Listen to it back and see if it sounds okay. Now you've checked your recorder AND you can use this little clip as a jingle on your show!

TOP TIP

If the gain is set too low, your voice on the test recording will be very low and you'll have to turn the volume way up to hear it properly.

If the gain is set too high, there are many indicators. The volume bars will consistently reach maximum and your voice will sound buzzy/fuzzy at its loudest points. This is called CLIPPING or PEAKING and it is evil.

The Zoom H1 even has its own peaking indicator. Switch the Zoom on, DON'T hit record but just speak into the microphone. If you speak too loudly or the gain is too high then the peak light will flash red.

Clipping happens when you make so much noise that the recorder doesn't know what to do with it so just makes this buzzy/fuzzy sound that is almost impossible to get rid of after it's been produced. Avoid it!

CONDUCT

How you carry out your interview is largely up to you, but it is important to keep some things in mind, especially to keep up the reputation of the station.

Preparation:

Obviously – do your research. Know your subject as well as you possibly can. It will be very obvious if you don't actually know much about your interviewee.

Watch read/loads of previous interviews of your subject. What questions have been asked time and time again? Try to avoid those.

Find out how long the interview will be. Build your interview plan around this and make sure you won't overrun.

Before the interview

1. Don't be late – it looks unprofessional, doesn't give you time to prepare and may impact the interview itself.
2. Remember to wear stash – your Cam FM T Shirt is your best friend.
3. Do a test recording with your interviewee in front of you. To check whether your recorder is picking them up properly, do a test. Get them to say:
'I'm _____ and you're listening to Cam FM 97.2'
Listen to it back and see if it sounds okay. Now you've checked your recorder AND you can use this little clip as a jingle on your show!

During the interview

1. The interview is probably taking place because your subject wishes to promote something such as an upcoming tour or new album. Please make sure you give sufficient time in your interview for this topic.
2. Let them talk. Give your subject time to answer their questions and try to avoid interrupting them mid sentence.

3. Stay in the moment. This is where preparation is important. If you turn up to the interview relying too much on your notes, then you'll spend more time working out what your next question is than actually listening to what the person opposite you is saying. Try to establish rapport, maintaining sensible levels of eye contact, nodding occasionally, etc.
4. Respond to their answers, but quietly! Feel free to respond to their answers by smiling and nodding but try not to do this vocally as it will come up in the
5. Delve deeper. If something your subject says is particularly interesting, try to ask more questions about it.
6. Be flexible. Have you found that they prefer/avoid a certain topic?
7. Time-check. Make sure you do this occasionally as the interview be cut short leaving you with questions unanswered.

Ending the interview

1. Again, remember to stick to the agreed interview duration.
2. Thank them for their time
3. Ask for a photo with your subject! With you looking swiggity swag in your new Cam FM T-Shirt it'll be the perfect photo to share on our social media pages.
4. If the interview's gone well, maybe drop a line in with them or their PR if they or someone else they manage would also be interested in an interview

To end, here is former station manager Jack Winstanley's advice on interviews:

'Give your interviewee an idea of what kind of questions you are going to ask and the shape of the interview. Don't necessarily give them the questions in full, but just topics of discussion to relax them about what you may ask.

Don't do a 'Paxman'. It is best to build up a good, chatty, bordering on friendly type rapport with your interviewee. In this manner you will get more from your interview than if you were asking probing question after probing question. This is particularly something to bear in mind when interviewing political guests.

Do your research. Have a rough idea of their general life/career so you can ask follow up questions to things they say.

Ask follow up questions if the answer allows it rather than sticking resolutely to your questions. It shows you are actually listening to the responses.

Do a sound test. The general industry standard is to ask them what they had for breakfast.

Wear headphones.'

CONCLUSION

Once you have your interview recorded, remember to edit it – cut out the not so good parts, maybe add a jingle or two and an introduction and voila! The more interview you do the better you will get!