ART OF INTERVIEWING

- A few guidelines

by

M.L. Mehta

Interview stories in a newspaper and journals play a significant role. They bring in freshness of approach and create impact of the personality being interviewed. Interview can be with regard to some subject or some impressions on a subject of the views of a popular public man.

Most interviews fall into one or two categories:

1. Personality: Here the subject is worth talking to simply because he is an interesting or important personality or an authority on a specific subject in his own right; one who is, perhaps, rarely accessible to the press. An eminent scientist, demographer, visiting family planning expert can fall into this category.

2. Hard news: In this category the subject has news of a specific nature to impart and is being interviewed primarily for that reason.

Of the two, the first category is the most difficult; the reporter has to keep the conversation going so that the subject's personality can come through and in the hope that something newsworthy will emerge.
The following steps are helpful for a successful interview story:

1. There are no set rules for interviewing.
2. The interviewer should know the subject matter of the interview and background of the person being interviewed.
3. It will be useful to have prepared questions but such questions should be very short and up to the point.
4. The interviewer should, for getting better results, enter into a conversation with the specialist so that he establishes a good rapport.
5. The interview should be held in the normal surroundings of the interviewee. This will help the subject being interviewed to be free and make himself feel comfortable.
6. Advance information to the subject is helpful from the point of view of fixing time, and helping the subject to collect the material.
7. In all interviews, politeness not firmness is a golden rule. Respect does not imply subservience. Try to weigh up your subject. If he looks nervous, keep your notebook out of sight for a while. After some time you can perhaps say:
"Do you mind if I make a note of that?" If he has got into his stride, the production of notebook at that stage is less likely to put him off.

8. Make sure that the subject knows your name and the paper or organisation you represent. Never let there be any doubt that you are interviewing him for the purpose of getting a story.

9. Don't scribble away in your notebook the whole time. Try to listen intelligently - and to look as though you are doing so.

10. The interviewer should study different types of publications like newspapers, magazines, et c., to find out the type of interviews they publish. This step will help him develop the type of stories that might get good market.

11. Use simple language for writing the copy of the interview. Similarly, questions put to the interviewee should also be simple and direct so that there is no ambiguity.

In fact, interviews are like sail-boats; the sails have to be adjusted to the direction of the wind. Home work, prepared questions, general knowledge are the triple controls to be checked beforehand.