

# Holland Cooke Media **Tips for Interviewers**

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**Bill Thompson** worked for me three times, in three different news organizations that I managed. And you can hear him interview literally hundreds of the most famous, most thoughtful people in the entire world, at [HeardEverything.com](http://HeardEverything.com).

Just listening to how-he-does what-he-does will be instructive to Talk hosts and news people. Here, in his own words, are interview techniques Bill recommends:

**Homework counts for most of your grade.** Absolutely nothing substitutes for proper preparation. If you're going to interview an author, read the book (or at least skim it thoroughly). For an athlete, know his current stats. A doctor? Be familiar with her specialty. With the Internet, there is no excuse for being unprepared (if there ever was before). Listeners can tell when you're "winging it."

**Warm up your guest.** Make small talk. Offer coffee. Art Linkletter had a clever way of making children comfortable on his TV show. He told me that having a child say her name, age, and grade in school allowed her to "test" her speaking voice — and then, properly warmed up, Art was free to ask her if her parents slept without any pajamas on.

The people you interview need an opportunity to "test their voice," too. [While setting levels] I ask authors to billboard the interview by reciting their name, the title of their book, and the name of their publishing house. This also helps ensure that I pronounce their name correctly.

**Give 'em an essay question.** A few years ago, I noticed people were tucking 3-by-5 cards back in their pockets as they were leaving my studio, saying, "Gee, I sure wish you'd asked me about..."

No interviewer can possibly think of everything a guest might want to say. So I now end every interview by asking, "Is there anything else you wanted to add, or any question you wanted me to ask you that I didn't?" About one third of the time, the best sound bite of the interview comes from their answer to that question.

**Break a rule.** You've no doubt seen interviewing how-to's that say, "Never ask a yes-or-no question." Horsefeathers. I ask yes-or-no questions daily, and get great answers. The likelihood of a guest giving a monosyllabic answer is almost nil.

**For heaven's sake, let them talk!** Presumably you have asked for the interview for a reason, and that reason should not be to show off how smart YOU are.

**Prefer fresh, not canned.** Getting your guest to put down those 3-by-5 cards filled with canned answers and just talk to you from the heart requires genuine interest and empathy on your part.

Eye contact, a nod of the head from time to time, and a smile will make your guest forget that they're being interviewed. Remember how easily Art Linkletter got great answers from children, the hardest people to interview?

I've literally had hundreds of people tell me after an interview that they were astonished at how relaxed I made them feel. I use no magic — just human-to-human contact.

**Have fun!** After all, isn't that why we're in this business? We get to meet the most fascinating people in the world, we have them all to ourselves for thirty or sixty minutes at a time, we can ask them anything we want, and we get paid to do this!