This episode is about interviewing. Interviewing is a very difficult skill that takes time to develop. This episode will address the aspects of the interview itself, specifically: selecting a location, what to do before the interview, during the interview, and after the interview. So four things there about the interview itself. And then, this episode will end with two specific tactics or strategies to use in an interview: the hunter and the farmer method. Let's get started.

The first thing to do when preparing for an interview is to select the best location that you can possibly use. Obviously, quiet is important. So choose a space that you think will be most quiet, inside and out. So if you're recording in someone's house: Which room is furthest from the street? Or furthest from the neighbor's house where they might be mowing the lawn for example? If you're selecting a place at a business or at a cafe: Is there a back room? Is there a less used room? What's the room at the end of the hallway, so you don't have people walking by engaged in hallway conversations while you're trying to conduct an interview inside.

Be certain to visit that location before the interview because you want to go test out that room, see what does it sound like. What kinds of sounds do you have to worry about? And the time of day that you schedule the interview should be the same time of day that you go to try to test the room before the interview, because different places sound differently at different times of day. An office--a room in an office--may sound very different around busy traffic times, in the morning and the evening, than it does in the middle of the day or than it does late at night. So the time of day matters. The birds outside, if you're near a window for example, the birds are active at dawn and dusk, and maybe certain times in the middle of the day, but less active at night. So the sounds at the time of day matter. So choose that location carefully. Go visit it ahead of time to see what kinds of sounds you can anticipate and to confirm that it is in fact the best possible location for your interview.

And lastly, always have a backup plan. What happens if you arrive on the day of your interview, and there's a fire in the building next to it? And there's just all kinds of sirens going on? Or what happens if the neighbor is mowing the lawn? Or any number of things could be going on. Have a backup plan: another room in the same building, another building altogether that you could go visit, an outdoor location perhaps. Have a backup plan always, and be prepared to use it. That's the things to think about when selecting a location for an interview. And the same thing could be said even if you're doing informal interviews on the street. You want to interview people coming in and out of a stadium or a pub. Go to that space ahead of time, and figure out where is the traffic and the noise coming from, so that you can position yourself away from that noise, so that you can point the microphone away from it and ask your guests your interviewees you can kind of gently guide them away from those noises, so you can get the best possible audio quality from them. So whether you're indoors or outdoors, visit the space, figure out how you need to arrange the space to best suit your needs. That's selecting the location.

Prior to the interview: contact your guest. Quite obviously let them know the purpose of the interview. Let them know the expectations for the kinds of things you expect to do, to discuss, during the interview. How long it might be. And if it's appropriate, you can circulate the questions in advance. And of course, thank them. Again they're taking time out of their day to help you out, so be gracious as always. Prior to the interview: so that's the kind of straightforward stuff to communicate with them about. Make sure they have a way that they can contact you, in case they're running late.

At the interview: arrive early. I cannot say this enough. Arrive 20 minutes early, and set up the space. Even if you're recording on your smartphone, and there's not a lot of gear to set up. You still need to configure the space in the room. Test out all of the chairs. Which chair is the least squeaky chair? You want your guest in the least squeaky chair. How can you position the chairs for the interview If you're in an interior space away from the heater or away from the noisy street? So you have control over the space. Arrange it how you want to arrange it. So that when your guest walks in, they don't know any different about how that space was arranged. But you have designed it to be the best audio studio that it can be for that temporary moment that it is an audio studio before it transforms back into whatever it is. Same thing again with interviews on the streets or in outdoor places in a park. Get there ahead of time. Figure out where the noisy bits are and the quieter bits are, and how you can position both yourself and your interviewee to be situated for that space.

The next thing that I recommend is turning on the microphone and starting the recording before the guest arrives, before your interviewee arrives. Why? Sometimes the laid-back and informal greetings or the side conversation that happens before the formal interview gets underway, sometimes that is some of the best audio that you end up getting. Really great greetings, really awkward moments, a chuckle here and there, a funny story. Those moments, you want to catch those on tape if you can because they might really impact your project in a good way. So I recommend turning on the microphone, starting the recording before the guest arrives, and when the guest walks in greet them, thank them for coming, and say, "Hey I've already turned on the microphone, and I'm just doing a test. I'm doing a demo recording to get a sense of how the room is. If you don't like anything that we say here, we don't have to use it." But just let them know that it's already on, and then in fact you can begin to test the audio and prepare your interviewee for the interview.

So you have to coach your guest on two things after they arrive: you have to coach them on the hardware, the microphones; and you have to coach them on what to expect in the interview. So first, tell them about the microphones and the setup that you have. Whether it's a smartphone or a more complicated setup, you are the expert, and you will build your own credibility with them by talking like an expert, and saying, "Well look, this is the microphone that we're using. This is how it works, so it's going to be this close to your face." Probably it will be quite close. And it will be weird and strange to people who are not used to having microphones in their face. So set them at ease with that. However close it needs to be to them let them know this is quite normal. You've checked all the levels, and you've done this specifically because you know how to get the best audio.

Also coach them, with regards to the microphone and hardware, about things they may not be aware of, such as shuffling papers, spilling water, tapping on the table, so on and so forth. People have things that they do when they get anxious, nervous speaking publicly, and that's perfectly fine. Just make them aware of--especially people like me who talk with their hands--make them aware of the different things the microphone might pick up. But at the same time, you can coach them on the interview and what to expect. So you can coach them and say, "Look, you know what? If we accidentally bang on the table, we can stop and restart and re-record anything. We can delete stuff, if you stumble and don't like what you said. No problem." Set them at ease. Odds are, your interviewee will be nervous. We often get nervous when speaking publicly, and your job is to set them at ease, and you do that by: one, demonstrating your confidence and competence with the equipment; and also by helping them understand that you are trying to make them sound as best as they possibly can. And that's your goal, and you'll do anything necessary to help them sound very good. So set them at ease. Let them know the expectations, how long you expect to go. Ask if they have any questions prior to starting, and then go ahead and test that recording that you've been doing this time. Hit stop, and play it back. Listen. Compliment them on the sound of their voice. This is the single most important pre-interview thing I would suggest, other than choosing a great location. Tell them they sound really good. Tell them how excellent their voice sounds, so resonant and beautiful. Make sure that in fact the audio recording does sound good. Listen for any details, again this also builds your credibility, so don't rush it. It demonstrates to the interviewee that you have your headphones in, you know exactly how to make them sound great, and you are well prepared to help them sound as best as possible.

Now let's say you've conducted the interview, you thank them profusely, send them on their way, and after the interview, always send a thank you message, and let them know what's the next step. What's the timeline they can expect when they will hear from you next about your final episode, or a draft of your episode that you'd like them to listen to? Just let them know. It's a courtesy at the end of the interview and as a follow-up via text or email or phone call that you continue to communicate with the people who've given their time to you. So those are the primary things to think about: selecting a location, communicating with your guest prior to the interview, setting up the space at the interview, turning on that microphone ahead of time to get any informal conversation, coaching the guest on the hardware, coaching them on the expectations for the interview, doing that test recording conducting the interview, and sending them on their way.

So now let's transition to talking about different methods or strategies for conducting an interview. One very common strategy that's often used in news reporting is to ask the interviewee before you begin the interview, "Can you please repeat back the main idea of the question at the beginning of your sentence by using complete sentences?" So if you ask about how the all blacks performed in their match last week, you want your interviewee not to say, "They were great; they were poor." "They" is vague and ambiguous to your listeners. You want them to say, "The all blacks were great or poor," or whatever the answer is. So coach your interviewees on that strategy prior to beginning the interview. Oftentimes that's a strategy that you will use, not all times, but often, where they repeat the main idea of the question that you just asked back to them, so that the listeners know exactly who you're talking about.

So let's talk now about two overall strategies for conducting an interview: the hunter and farmer methods. And I'll start with the farmer method. The farmer method is an open-ended way of engaging in a dialogue and a conversation with a guest that doesn't have necessarily a specific direction already set out. You might have a couple waypoints or stops along the way, topics that you want to get to. But the manner in which you travel between those topics is not already clearly set out. Instead, the farmer method asks you as the interviewer to listen carefully to your interviewee, to follow the direction of the conversation, to ask follow-up questions related to the new ideas and new concepts and new things that your interviewee brings to the table, rather than allowing your view as the interviewer to dominate the direction of the conversation. In the metaphor of the farmer, you're allowing the conversation to "grow "in whatever ways best suits that conversation. Yes, you're "planting seeds," but you are not in full control of the direction or the duration of the conversation, if that makes sense. This is a really difficult way to conduct interviews because it requires listening carefully, even while you're nervous yourself. Sometimes I recommend taking notes for follow-up questions that you might want to ask or ideas that you want to pursue later in the conversation. But beware of asking long and winding questions: that's the temptation here. Try to keep your questions short and focused to guide the interviewee into those answers that they want to provide to you. This is the farmer method; it's more open-ended. You start in a place by planting a seed, but you don't quite know how or when it will end.

The hunter method, on the other hand, is a targeted strategy where you have an idea of a kind of specific sound bite that you want to fit the story that you are beginning to put together, and so you ask a very specific leading question to get the sound bite that you want. So whereas a farmer question might ask, "What did you think of the all blacks match last week?" The hunter question might say, "How horribly did the all blacks play last week?" Boom. That's gonna evoke an answer like, "Ugh! They played absolutely horrifically, and I was disgusted." That is a really good sound bite that you might want to use. Of course, there are ethical questions that come with choosing either the hunter or the farmer method. In a way, the hunter method is tricky because you, as the interviewer, already have an idea of the story, and you are leading your interviewees to the place where you want them to go. It's a bit manipulative in some ways. At the same time, however, you might want the hunter method if you are doing a story on two polarized political parties or two polarized fan bases for a football club. You might know in advance, to create this polarized dynamic, you need sound bites from really both ends of the spectrum. It's really important that you get that really good audio, so you can ask leading questions to create that space, these hunter style questions. And as long as the interviewees are content with you sharing whatever it is that they've said, then that's perfectly fine to put that on the podcast. So the hunter method is not without its ethical conundrums, but it is a method that some people find they choose to use. Whereas the farmer method with its more open-ended strategy is very difficult to master but can lead to some provocative conversations between interviewees and interviewers.

It's also worth adding that the hunter, and especially the farmer, methods of interviewing are quite different than the traditional journalistic modes of interviewing. Journalistic modes often emphasize interrogating subjects, holding political figures and public figures accountable for their actions and their words, speaking truth to power. This confrontational style of journalism and interviewing is often well suited to the aspects of journalism that we hold important to a democratic society. But other genres of podcasting, like the narrative nonfiction genre, for example, emphasize a more open way of telling a story and gathering a story. And both the hunter and farmer methods are well suited to those genres. In fact famous oral historian Studs Turkle says "how" and "why" questions can be very harmful and destructive. And for him, he says he quite likes simple questions like, "And what happened then?" "Tell me more." These questions, he says, help frame the conversation as a conversation, rather than an inquisition. For him, he emphasizes that the three main rules of conducting an interview are: listen, listen, and listen. So keep that in mind as you move forward, that different interviewing styles lead to different types of stories.

That's the hunter and farmer methods of conducting an interview, and the overall strategies for thinking through the before, during, and after an interview as well as selecting a superb location for an interview and always having a backup plan.

I encourage you now to go conduct a practice interview with a family member, someone in your whānau, a colleague, a flatmate. Practice these skills. Pick a topic that you know you have in common with your friend or family member, and try to practice both the hunter method and the farmer method. Try to practice setting them at ease, teaching them how to use the microphone. Try to practice selecting a space and configuring the space to get the best audio. These are all skills that are really important to practice, so that the first time you go out and get an interview for your podcast is not also the first time that you've done those things overall, because it could seem very, very nerve-wracking and anxiety-inducing. But the more you practice it, the more comfortable you get in that space, and the more you do feel like the expert that you are in conducting an interview. Thanks for listening. Kia ora.