

VOX-POPS

The VOX-POP is used to voice popular opinion about a given topic or subject area. It is commonly used in radio journalism to provide listeners with a variety of opinions. It can be used within a larger feature to go alongside interviews and other content, or it can be used on its own to shed more light onto an area.

The structure of the VOX-POP is very straight forward. It usually involves coming with two or three questions based around a subject area. You should ensure that these questions are 'open-ended'. Open-ended questions are those that require more than a 'yes' or 'no' answer. This is important because you want to get long responses from the people you encounter.

When you edit together your VOX-POP try to keep all the responses together. You don't need to repeat the question over and over again (see the example below). Also, you don't have to use every response you get: edit out the ones that are too short or irrelevant.

The following is an example of a small vox-pop piece. It uses a very simple introduction to explain to listeners what the piece is going to be about. The presenter guides the piece with a couple of questions throughout before providing a short summary. This VOX-POP could be used in a full-radio program focussing on sport.

TITLE: Money and Sport
PRODUCER: Brendan Vince
DATE: 10/06/05
Length: 1'26"

The presenter introduces us to the concept of money in sport and gives us a brief background to it. Notice the use of a question at the end to provoke curiosity in the audience.

PRESENTER: Money, we all need it, we always want more. Some people have a lot of it, while others have none. We all want to grow up and get a good paying job, however, are people paid what they're really worth, or are some people overpaid? Sports stars are one section of the workforce that get it all: the money, the babes, the fast cars. Should this be the case?

The presenter poses the question that people will be expected to answer

PRESENTER: If you were a sports star and famous and earned a million dollars a year, what sort of things would you spend it on?

WOMAN: If would have to give a lot to charity, because it would be a lot more than I earn now and I'm surviving okay.

GIRL: Clothes and a car, and a new house.

BOY: An island... my own island... in the Whitsundays.

People provide a range of responses to the question

MAN: Ahhh... probably invest the lot the first year then thereafter, if I thought I had a lot, I'd give the rest away.

The presenter poses another question

PRESENTER: What does it say about Australian culture that we pay sport stars so much money but we underpay teachers?

BOY: Because we love sport more than teachers probably?

WOMAN: I think we pay sport stars too much, but then again, it's publicising good things that are happening in the world and getting people to do good things rather than bad things.

MAN: Yes, I think that's a shame. We seem to be copying ideas from the UK and other places like that, where we've sort of gone haywire with this payment business. It's just making sport all together too important.

The presenter provides a brief summary of people's opinions

PRESENTER: There you have it, a wide range of varied opinion about money and sport.

INTERVIEWS

Interviews are an integral part of a radio feature. They vary in length and in style, but are essential in providing listeners with information and facts around a topic.

RESEARCH

The first step to preparing for an interview is undergoing research into the topic you are dealing with. When you are doing research you will usually come across names of individuals or organisations who are 'experts' on certain topics. These people are usually appointed or paid to speak to the public about their given area. You need to ask yourself how this person would add to the topic you are going to be dealing with. Do they have a broad knowledge of the subject? Do they express a strong opinion? Are they controversial? Would listeners be interested in what this person has to say? If so, then do as much research around the person and/or organisation as possible. Find out any interesting statistics surrounding the topic. Gain a clear understanding of the history surrounding it. List the key figures, whether they be organisations or individuals, who are associated with the topic. This will help you to come up with interesting questions that will also engage your audience.

PREPARING QUESTIONS

The questions you ask will **always** reflect the amount of research you have done into a topic. Many people hear announcers on radio reeling out questions as though they have just come up with them in the studio. This is never the case. A professional presenter will always prepare her or his questions before entering the studio, and they will always have them written down on paper and sitting in front of them. A professional presenter will always rehearse these questions by reading them out a few times to ensure that they don't stumble over tricky words or pronunciations.

Questions should always be open-ended. This means that the interviewee is forced to give their opinion rather than just a 'yes' or 'no' answer. Try to begin questions using the words what, how, when and why. If in doubt, also place a 'and if so, why?' at the end of your question to ensure a response.

An excellent way of engaging with an interviewee is by asking them to address facts or statements. For example:

Try to use statistics and facts in your questions. Show your audience that you

Profession Johnson, a new study from the Australian Bureau of Statistics has found that 21% of young Australians can't find full-time work. Why do you think this is the case?

When Indonesian custom officers opened up your bag Ms. Corby, they found a large sum of marijuana. Surely this is damning evidence, how do you explain it Ms. Corby?

Premier Lenin, you have been quoted as saying that, I quote, "I have never used styling gel or hair products of any kind as State Premier". But footage captured in parliament earlier this week shows you clearly applying something into your hair, what was it, and do you deny using it?

have a knowledge of the subject you are dealing with.

Listening is also an important part of interviewing. It is important that you listen very carefully to what the interviewee is talking about. In many cases, an interviewee will mention important facts or points of interest that may intrigue an audience so be prepared to think on the spot and ask any questions that come to your head. Some interviewees also tend to talk too much or deviate from the line of questioning.

Australian Broadcasting Corporation
TV PROGRAM TRANSCRIPT
LOCATION: <http://www.abc.net.au/7.30/content/2005/s1377138.htm>
Broadcast: 25/05/2005
Reporter: Kerry O'Brien

The presenter introduces the interviewee and provides us with a detailed explanation of her background

KERRY O'BRIEN: Alice Sebold is a literary phenomenon. Her first novel, 'The Lovely Bones', sold close on 5 million copies in the US alone. It's been published in nearly 40 countries, sold 250,000 copies here in Australia, and was on the 'New York Times' bestseller list for 66 weeks. Peter Jackson of 'Lord of the Rings' fame is making the movie. It's a story of a 14-year-old girl who is raped, murdered and dismembered, then goes to heaven and spends the rest of the book observing what happens to the family and friends she has left behind. But Alice Sebold had written an earlier factual book, a powerful and compelling account of her own savage rape and its devastating impact on her and those around her - a book she rather ironically called 'Lucky'. Compared to 'The Lovely Bones', it's barely rippled the pond, but wherever she goes these days, people invariably want to talk about her own experience, many of them also victims of violence and brutality. Alice Sebold is here for Sydney Writers' Week.

Alice Sebold, can you explain at the start why you called your first book 'Lucky'? It was, after all, a book about your brutal rape.

ALICE SEBOLD, AUTHOR: I called it 'Lucky' for every reason you could probably think of, both ironically, because obviously I wasn't lucky, but also ultimately seriously because I do feel, as things worked out, that I was lucky. So, it's almost as if you're looking at things from all perspectives, so it was an all-encapsulating word.

The presenter quotes an element of the writer's work. This shows the audience that he has done his research

KERRY O'BRIEN: It was particularly brutal. You were a virgin of 18. The book is compelling from cover to cover, but there were two quotes that, to me, said a great deal. You wrote: "My life was over. My life had just begun." And at another point: "I share my life with my rapist. He is the husband to my fate." Can you elaborate?

ALICE SEBOLD: Well, in terms of the last one - and actually I think I will probably address both quotes at the same time - I think when something so intense happens to you, particularly when it did happen to me, which was at 18, which is a turning time for everyone in their life, it changes the nature of how your life is going to go on from that moment forward. I think to deny that it would change your life is foolish, and so in that way, both those sentences refer to that just pragmatic reality.

KERRY O'BRIEN: That your life could never be the same again.

ALICE SEBOLD: Right, and I will say at the same time there is usually a negative connotation to the phrase, "Your life will never be the same again". I don't think it has to remain a negative connotation. Obviously that is not a wonderful thing to have happen to you, but usually there is that romantic idea of like, "And she was never the same again", and I really fight against that idea. I despise it, actually, so...

KERRY O'BRIEN: Six months later, you actually saw your rapist in the street, put yourself through a harrowing courtroom process, and he went to jail for a minimum eight years. Did that make it any easier for you to deal with the immense trauma of it all?

ALICE SEBOLD: I think, in using the title of my book, that as opposed to many victims I was lucky in that I was allowed to use the legal system to exact some

sense of justice in my case.

KERRY O'BRIEN: You finished 'Lucky' with the statement that you now live in a world where both hell and hope lie in the palm of your hand.

ALICE SEBOLD: Right.

KERRY O'BRIEN: That was six or seven years ago. Is that still the case - hell and hope in the palm of your hand?

ALICE SEBOLD: I think anybody who is honest about the way they look at life and what is available to them and out there in the world has to honestly see that those two realities are there all the time for all of us. So, if you go forward honestly, you see those two possibilities. You can walk through a doorway and have something amazing happen. You can walk through a doorway and have something horrible happen. I think most of us prefer to be blind to that reality. It's an easier way to get through the everyday, but if you stop and think about it, that's just the way the everyday is.

KERRY O'BRIEN: And here you are today a literary phenomenon with your first novel, 'The Lovely Bones', but people queue up to talk about rape and violence, just like I have. You recently recalled the young woman in your audience in Philadelphia who said, "You're going to be talking about rape for the rest of your life. Does it bother you?" It obviously does bother you.

ALICE SEBOLD: I'm...a little tired of it. You know, I'm a writer first in my own mind. I think that one of the things that happens is that you want to - I feel a responsibility, and have always, to represent the experience to say that you can be raped and have a full life, but what's interesting is that often people don't allow you, when you're in this kind of environment, to talk about other things that may compel you more. I think of myself as a writer, not a rape victim, but rape is the more potable commodity. It's a word that makes a nicer headline than writing.

KERRY O'BRIEN: But it's also one - there are a lot of people out there who have been victims of rape or other forms of violence...

ALICE SEBOLD: Yes, exactly, exactly.

KERRY O'BRIEN: ..who clearly gravitate, who do relate.

ALICE SEBOLD: Right, right.

KERRY O'BRIEN: It's not just exploitation, is it?

ALICE SEBOLD: No, I'm thrilled by that. Doing the readings, doing the public events where I'm actually meeting people one on one is why I continue to go out at all, so... Otherwise I'd be home with my dog, babe! (Laughs)

KERRY O'BRIEN: What did you take from 'The Lovely Bones' apart from its immense success? It seems remarkable you can write a book about a young girl who was raped, killed and dismembered yet for many it becomes an uplifting book.

ALICE SEBOLD: Just the experience of writing, I imagine, the same things that I - the process of writing is why I write. You know, it's the typical quote of "The journey is the destination", so the actual writing of the sentences and the playing with the language and the creating of the characters is why I do it.

KERRY O'BRIEN: I imagine many people would be fascinated with your vision

The announcer uses his knowledge of the subject to further engage with the interviewee

of heaven. How would you describe it, in a nutshell, and how did you arrive at it?

ALICE SEBOLD: I've always thought of it primarily - I mean, obviously I created it by creating Susie, who created her own heaven, but I always think of it as Susie's heaven, not my own, and I arrived at it via the character of Susie. It's often the thing that's the most difficult to describe - I can't even describe it to myself - which is characters give you their world, somehow, even though you're actually writing them. So it was a 14-year-old girl's heaven, but specific to this 14-year-old girl, Susie.

KERRY O'BRIEN: Did you go through any kind of spiritual journey yourself in working that out?

ALICE SEBOLD: No, I always feel that's a disappointment when I answer the question, because I didn't. I was speaking in New Zealand, actually - I guess last night or the night before - and saying that I think that maybe if I had had a more classic religious upbringing I would not have been able to write the heaven as I wrote it because I would have felt like there were more "shoulds" in place. Really the heaven in the book comes from a pretty open sense of play that I had about the whole idea.

KERRY O'BRIEN: One critic observed it was curiously godless - that being in heaven was like participating in a self-help encounter group; that it was oddly consumerist - that to get something all you had to do was desire it enough.

ALICE SEBOLD: I'm glad I give critics a reason to write.

KERRY O'BRIEN: And having embraced the extraordinary success of 'The Lucky Bones', do you worry now about how you can possibly replicate that? I get the sense that the money doesn't actually matter all that much to you, that it is the writing?

ALICE SEBOLD: Right. I mean, it took me 20 years to get anything published, so if I was still writing by that time, then you have to really love what you do, and I do. I'm not worried about replicating the success because I have no illusions that I will.

KERRY O'BRIEN: As corny as it might sound, as we sit here now, do you hold more hope than hell in the palm of your hand? It's a great expression.

ALICE SEBOLD: It does indeed sound corny. (Laughs)

KERRY O'BRIEN: It's a great expression!

ALICE SEBOLD: Thank you, thank you. I think again what I would say is I keep them both there in equal measurement because that's indeed the way we live.

KERRY O'BRIEN: Because fate can be a mean beast?

ALICE SEBOLD: Right - exactly. That's a nice expression.

KERRY O'BRIEN: Alice Sebold, thanks for talking with us.

ALICE SEBOLD: Thank you.

Always thank the person you
are interviewing for their time

This is the introduction to the piece that is read out by the presenter in the studio. It gives a background to the piece

KERRY O'BRIEN: Every four years, the Paralympics serve to remind us all that physical disability is no insurmountable barrier to sporting achievement. It's a message that's been taken literally by one group of surfers in Australia, who are helping people with disabilities discover the thrill of the surf. Jonathan Harley reports.

The sound effect is used to give a sense of place

(Sound of the beach washing upon the shore)

In this instance, the piece uses the voice of one of the people interviewed to introduce people to the piece

GARY BLASCHKE, DISABLED SURFING ASSOCIATION: When we first started taking disabled people to the beach, the amount of stares, the amount of comments that we had from the general public was unbelievable.

JONATHAN HARLEY: These gentle waves at Gerroa on the New South Wales south coast may not be world championship material but they are producing some unlikely surfing legends.

KELLY McCANN: I don't really think there is nothing I can't do, really. I do surfing, what can't I do, you know.

The interviewer gives a brief introduction to the piece - we don't yet know that the story is about disabled surfing, but it leads us into it

JONATHAN HARLEY: None more extraordinary than Kelly McCann. Ever since she was in a terrible car accident when she was just 3-years-old, Kelly McCann's had no movement in her arms or legs, and can't even breathe properly without a ventilator.

KELLY McCANN: People see the chair before they see you and they just think, "Oh my God! The poor person. She won't be able to do much." I don't think of myself as disabled. I usually forget because I do everything I want to do and need to do to keep me happy...keep my mind off it.

From this section here the audience gets a sense of what the story is going to be about

MARISA SMITH: My biggest fear as a nurse is: can I get air to her? If I can get air to her, I figure, the logistics we can work around.

JONATHAN HARLEY: The logistics are mind boggling.

GARY BLASCHKE: She will hold her breath, yes, I will control it...

JONATHAN HARLEY: While Disabled Surf Association founder Gary Blaschke works out the plan with his team of volunteers...

GARY BLASCHKE: 1, 2, 3...

This piece uses a range of voices and interviews to build the story

JONATHAN HARLEY: Kelly McCann forgoes her electric ventilator for a hand pumped one. This entire exercise hinges on keeping Kelly's airway dry.

MARISA SMITH: Surfing, the worst case scenario can be getting water in the trachea.

MAN 1: Probably the last time about six waves, depending on how she is going, you know.

GARY BLASCHKE: Depending on how many wipe-outs we get, yes!

JONATHAN HARLEY: Kelly McCann's never come off the board yet and for all the jokes, there's a serious effort to keep it that way. The air bag is off just for the short time of the ride.

KELLY McCANN: For me, lying on the board, looking up at the sky, see the sun,

just see the clouds, see the water beside you and all these people are confident in you, and... you're confident in them, and being free and when you're gliding along the water, feels like you're flying. Flying or something like that. So..., yes, it's great.

MAN 1: Righto, guys, line up.

JONATHAN HARLEY: Gary Blaschke set up the Disabled Surfing Association after a motorbike accident threatened to end his surfing days.

GARY BLASCHKE: I've taken blind people out that, you know, 35-years-old, never felt sand between his toes and has never been to the beach. Didn't know what a wave was, had to explain how waves were created.

JONATHAN HARLEY: Nearly 20 years later, thousands like Len Snowdon are getting help to catch waves.

LEN SNOWDON: That wave, that wave was unbelievable!

JONATHAN HARLEY: Len Snowdon lost an arm and a leg in 1992 in a train accident at BHP's Wollongong steel works.

LEN SNOWDON: That was 13 years ago now. It's still extremely hard to actually come to terms with.

JONATHAN HARLEY: He had never been on a surfboard before the accident, but strange as it may seem, surfing became the key to his recovery.

LEN SNOWDON: It's given me the opportunity to experience life to the maximum, and to be accepted as not a disabled person but as a person having a surf.

JONATHAN HARLEY: Nevertheless, the association only just stays afloat, thanks to a good will and a trickle of donations. It can't buy enough boards, aquatic wheelchairs and other bits of kit to support what may be Australia's fastest-growing surfing movement.

GARY BLASCHKE: We have something to sell to the rest of the world. I think we can teach a lot of people around the world not to lock your disabled people up in rooms and let them waste away, let 'em get out there and experience what life is all about: fun, surfing.

JONATHAN HARLEY: But as Kelly McCann discovered, the surf is an unpredictable thing.

KELLY McCANN: I was just flying along the waves and next thing I know, I thought I would die for five seconds there. Underwater.

MARISA SMITH: Next thing I know the surfboard's there and there's no Kelly.

JONATHAN HARLEY: Suction is needed to clear the water from Kelly's McCann's airway. It's a painful procedure, and distressing to watch. But it's not enough to keep Kelly McCann out of the water.

KERRY O'BRIEN: Extraordinary and inspiring to think of the effort behind the laughs. Jonathan Harley reporting there.

The announcer in the studio closes the story