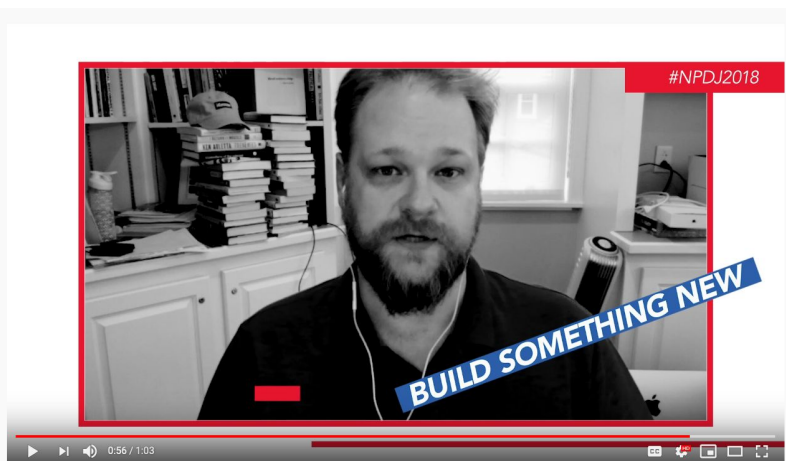
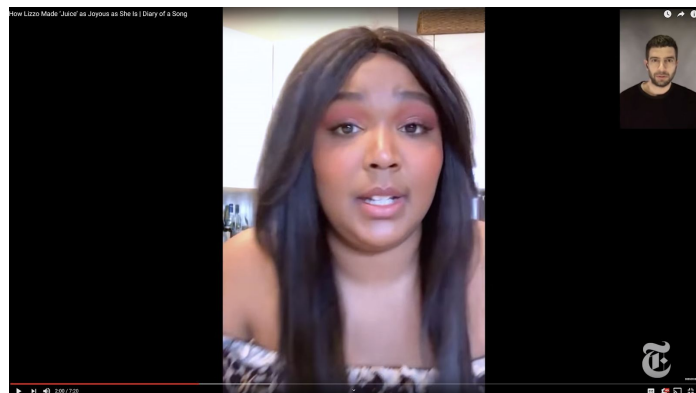


Conducting Virtual Interviews



**Using footage of full screen capture of a Skype call, and color, text and graphics, French journalists added visual interest to [this video](#).*



**In its Diary of a Song series, the New York Times uses vertical video recorded by their source -- in [this video](#) it's pop star Lizzo -- to create an informal feel.*

During the pandemic, safe journalism demands that reporters and their sources keep their distance. Luckily, video journalists have been conducting remote interviews for years. And today's virtual web tools allow journalists to reach sources remotely and conduct recorded interviews. Here are tips and tools to help you make high-quality interview footage from afar.

Step 1: Choose your technology

[Zoom Meeting](#) and [Skype](#) are growing in popularity with journalists for remote interviews. Both platforms offer free versions and allow you to record the video and audio of the interview.

- Make sure you can **record both video and audio** - Check that the software is recording both. Choose 1080p recording if possible.
- Test your [internet connection](#) - Prior to your interview test your WiFi connection by recording a test video call to a friend, and watch it. If your home wifi is weak, you can see if your phone's personal hotspot (tips for [Android](#), [iPhone](#)) provides a more reliable connection.
- Using a laptop, tools like FaceTime combined with Screen Recording or QuickTime (on Macs) or Skype and Screen Recorder (Windows) can allow even more options. Paid tools like ecamm's [Call Recorder](#) (\$40) or Callnote (\$9.95/mo) offer more sophisticated capabilities.

Step 2: Reach out to your source

- Send an email or make a call **introducing yourself**. Explain the video story you're working on and that you would like to conduct a remote interview.
- Provide an estimated amount of **time the interview will require**, adding about ten minutes before the interview starts so you and the source can work together to get their camera, background and audio set.
- Ask them to **set up** in a quiet room with natural light, if possible -- and you do the same.
- Once they agree to the interview, ask them if they can **provide videos or photos** that can serve as archival material or b-roll for your story.

Step 3 (Optional): Arrange a secondary audio recording

- If your source has a laptop computer with a camera, you should ask your source to use their phone, positioned off camera but close to their face

during the interview to **record a simultaneous second audio track**. They can email it to you after the interview.

Step 4: Select the location for the interview and prepare the phone/laptop.

- If you and your sources are using phones, set them both horizontally so the self-facing cameras are **at eye level**, like on a few books. For a laptop, raise it slightly as well.
- Encourage your source to position the window where your face will appear near the camera so it's comfortable for them to see it and be recorded.
- **Indirect natural light** is the best option. If that's unavailable, use household lighting, for example a lamp bouncing off the ceiling. Avoid light sources from directly above or below, which create weird shadows. Make sure neither of you has a bright light source, like a window, behind you which will mess up the contrast.

Step 5: Do a test call to check the tech and practice questions

- With a friend or classmate in another location, practice recording your interview, and practice the questions you'd like to ask. (see bottom for some tips on that)?

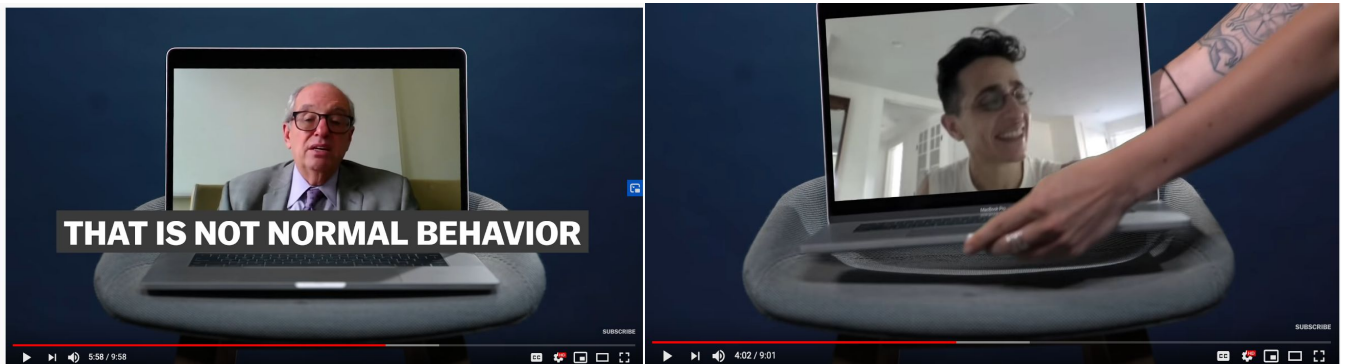
Step 6: Conduct the interview

- If you are recording additional audio tracks, after the recording starts do a loud clap on camera to help you **sync tracks** later.
- Try to maintain direct **eye contact** with your source by looking at the camera as much as possible, gently encouraging them to look right at the camera. Pause between answers to look briefly at your notes.
- The software will be **recording you** as well, so don't type or use the mouse during the interview. Pause between answers to check your notes to see the next question.
- if the video connection **lags**, graciously ask your source to repeat themselves.

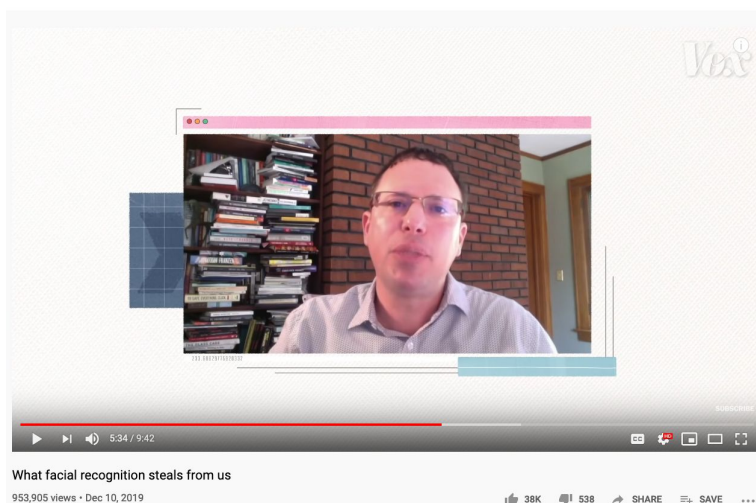
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- Wear headphones during the interview to monitor audio; if you're not recording simultaneous audio, **repeat answers** when audio drops.
 - When the interview is over, **check the recording** to make sure there weren't any snafus.

Step 7: Edit the interview

- Video conferencing software exports recorded interviews with picture-in-picture options. By using screen recording software during the interview, you can export full 1080p video of the source being interviewed, as Vox does below:



*In [this video](#), a Vox reporter conducted Skype interviews and recorded full screen videos of them. Later they [keyed the footage](#) to make it look like it was on the screens of laptops with blank screens that they had filmed in the studio.



*[In this video](#) Vox used a similar technique but animated the full-screen recording footage with abstract shapes around them to give the video a spooky and stylized look.

Bonus: Tips for good interviews

STORY IS EVERYTHING

Do your research, get to know your subject, stay the course.

Always ask yourself: “how does this person advance the story?” and “are they connecting with the audience with clear facts, genuine reaction or emotion?”

THE INTERVIEW

KNOW WHO YOU ARE INTERVIEWING

- Write out potential sound bites that you need for your story. Don't stop until you get them.
- Ask the right questions. ALWAYS write them ahead of time. Go over them. KNOW THEM.
- Ask good questions—this is part of story structure because the quality of the questions you ask will help determine if you are doing a narrated video vs first-person video.
- A good question is open ended.
- A good question is directly tied into the theme and angle of your story.
- A good question elicits emotion, reaction or opinion.
- Have your characters answer questions in complete sentences. Do not interrupt them!
- And ask them to repeat an answer when it needs to be “cleaned up.” Again, this will impact the transcribing and editing process. It's all tied in.

SETUP

- Small talk during camera set-up to make them feel comfortable.
- Sound check - GET THEM TO TALK - not just “check, check, 1, 2, 3”. Ask them “What did you have for breakfast” or “tell me what you thought of the last movie you saw”. Get a real conversational level out of them.

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- Open them up: “Tell me who are you, and what do you do”. Mid-way through the interview if it feels to be stalling ask them “Tell me who are you, and what do you do”, when you feel the interview is wrapping up ask them one more time “Tell me who are you, and what do you do”.
 - Listen! Ask follow up questions.
 - Ask them to restate an answer if it goes on too long, or seems incoherent.

TRANSCRIPTION

- ALWAYS transcribe. Transcription is never a waste of time
- Emotions are transcribable too. When do they cry, laugh, are scared, smile.
- Use Time Codes
- Cut out sound bites. 2 piles. Good sound bites, bad sound bites.
- Start to build your story arc with your good sound bites.
- Do not throw out your bad sound bites.