

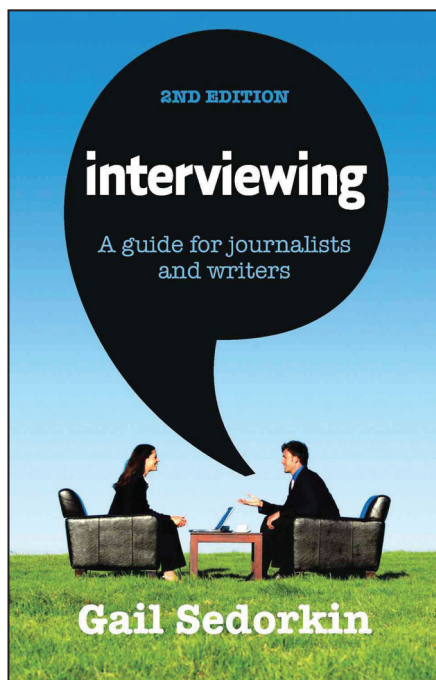
Noted

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Old hands advise the new

Interviewing: A guide for journalists and writers, by Gail Sedorkin (2nd edition). Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2011, 206 pp. ISBN 978-1742370941

THE best journalists are invariably good interviewers, whether they are interrogating a Cabinet minister or getting a shy refugee to open up about her struggle to find work. Excellence in interviewing comes with experience. So when the visiting scientist lapses into technical jargon at his press conference, it's usually the most experienced journalist in the room who asks 'the dumb question'. Where fledgling reporters lack the necessary courage and confidence, the experienced reporter knows that showing his ignorance is a small price to pay for getting to the truth. Gail Sedorkin sanctions asking 'the naively dumb but not completely stupid question', but says it's only as a short-term solution. A better strategy is to be 'professionally curious', read widely and build



a background knowledge on which to base your line of questioning, in other words, there's no substitute for knowing your stuff.

In this second edition of *Interviewing*, the Australian journalist and educator gives practical, detailed advice on preparing for interviews and getting the best out of them. Rich in case studies, checklists and bullet points, the book goes step by step through the research process, finding news angles, preparing your equipment (from pen and paper to sophisticated recording devices), making appointments and preparing questions. Sedorkin distinguishes the

needs of ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ news, print and broadcast platforms, covers vox pops and doorstops, deathknocks and in-depth profile interviews, gives tips on dealing with politicians, celebrities, criminals, innocents, children and experts. There is advice on doing email, Skype and phone interviews, and an excellent chapter called Keeping Safe that explains how to stay on the right side of the law, sources and editors. Readers are frequently encouraged to listen intently to what sources are saying, and at one point are told that keeping silent can encourage sources to talk. On matters of cross-cultural reporting, however, the book is limited, getting little further than tips on how to dress for a tangi.

Much of the wisdom comes from respected, if now retired, old hands. While they are mostly Aussies, like former ABC 7.30 Report host Kerry O’Brien, there are a couple of Kiwis too—former Radio New Zealand journalists Al Morrison and Brian Edwards. Although the frontline advice seems dated at times—12 of Sedorkin’s 14 personal and email interviews with these journos were done in 2001 or earlier—their tips are mostly timeless. Appended to *Interviewing* is a helpful list of journalism websites from Australia, the UK and the US. Overall it’s a useful textbook for beginners and for industry pros looking to raise their game.

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Technology’s impact on English not all bad.

english for journalists, by Wynford Hicks (20th ed.), London, New York: Routledge, 2013. ISBN9780415661720 (pbk).

MANY an argument between journalism educators has been conducted in the corridors of AUT over points of grammar, spelling, style and punctuation. These were eventually resolved, but usually without all agreeing. I can remember in particular a heated debate over whether team and band should be plural or singular. I lost to the sports and arts writers who insisted on the former. My shelf contains many books on such matters and now has arrived yet another small volume to add to the growing ranks. And a very useful one it is too. Those who winced at my starting a sentence with ‘And’ can relax. Wynford Hicks, the author, calls the prohibition on starting a sentence with this conjunction a ‘silly ban’ (p. 5) and claims fragments are nothing new and are being used increasingly by respected writers and the general public alike. Before launching into a consideration of such arcane matters as the rules