

# TESTIMONY: FILMING PRELIMINARY FIELD INTERVIEWS



Filming for human rights can be dangerous. It can put you, the people you are filming and the communities you are filming in at risk. Carefully assess the risks before you press “record.”

Do your best to implement the guidance below, but understand that nothing stated in this guide is absolute, and you should modify the practices to fit your needs. When possible, seek support from local experts. Even if you cannot fully implement this guidance, your footage may still provide valuable information that could lead human rights organizations and advocates to answers and, in turn, to the protection of our basic human rights.

## INTRODUCTION

There are many reasons frontline documenters may want to record on-camera testimony of people who have suffered, witnessed, or have information about human rights situations. These reasons include:

- empowering people who underwent human rights abuses by giving them an opportunity to tell their stories;
- sharing stories with the media to draw attention to a human rights situation and amplify the voices of the victims;
- sharing stories with key decision-makers to influence policies and laws;
- preserving personal stories for the historical record; and
- documenting abuses to support justice and legal accountability efforts.

If your primary goal in filming testimony is to document it for legal accountability purposes, experts recommend that you:

- get professional training on how to conduct such interviews; and
- document the interview in writing instead of on camera under most circumstances.

The reasons for these recommendations are summarized in Part II below, but in short, irresponsibly collecting, copying, or circulating a recorded interview can seriously endanger the life of the witness.

# GOAL

While the general recommendation is to get training and to turn off the camera if you are collecting testimony *solely* as part of human rights investigations, the reality is that frontline documenters don't always have access to training and are often on the ground collecting testimony during or immediately after human rights violations, when it's difficult to pull out a pen and paper. In light of this reality, this section provides guidance on filming testimony to support legal accountability efforts, should you decide to film testimonies during a human rights situation without much time to thoughtfully plan out an interview. The specific goals for this section are as follows:

- to provide guidance on whether to record testimony on camera or write it down; and
- to provide guidance, should you decide to press record, on how to film a preliminary field interview that will help professional investigators and lawyers secure accountability for human rights violations.

This section is broken down into the following parts that can be read separately or together:

## PART I Preliminary Field Interviews v. Comprehensive Interviews

This part defines the types of interviews that are typically conducted with witnesses and defines the different categories of witnesses.

## PART II Choose Your Recording Method

Here we explore the reasons for capturing an interview on camera or not.

## PART III Principles and Practical Tips for Filming Preliminary Field Interviews

This part summarizes the key principles to abide by to ensure you are capturing testimony in a safe, ethical, and effective manner.

## PART IV Conducting Preliminary Interviews: Before, During, and After

This part provides practical step-by-step guidance on how to film the interview, including what to do before, during, and after the on-camera testimony is provided.

## PART V More About Informed Consent

Here we define “informed consent” and explore the challenging questions around how to obtain it and what to do when you can't.

### ADVOCACY



### EVIDENCE



## KEY POINT

### DIFFERENTIATING VIDEO ADVOCACY FROM VIDEO EVIDENCE

**Video Advocacy** is the use of video to draw attention to a human rights issue and pressure targeted audiences to take action, in order to create change in human rights practice, policy, or law. The primary goals of filming a person's testimony for advocacy are to:

- tell a compelling story;
- empower the interviewee to tell their own story;
- honor the basic human rights of freedom of expression and participation in governmental decision-making;
- amplify voices that aren't often heard and include these voices in the call for change; and
- preserve a historical record for generations to come.

**Video Evidence**, loosely defined, is the use of video documentation in human rights justice processes to hold states or individuals civilly or criminally accountable for violations of human rights. Video can be used at every stage of the justice process, starting with the call for an investigation and ending in the courtroom. The primary aim is to secure a judgment from a court that requires that a state act, that damages be paid, that a perpetrator be sent to prison, or that an individual who has been wrongly accused to be set free. The primary goals of documenting a person's testimony for evidentiary use are:

- to objectively obtain factual information about the incident (who, what, when, where, etc.);
- to identify other witnesses and evidence;
- to provide a sufficient amount of information to professional investigators, in case they want to follow up with the interviewee at a later date; and
- to eventually hold a state or individual accountable for the human rights crime that has been committed, or to free someone who has been falsely accused.

If you are a frontline documenter and are documenting for advocacy reasons, you will often record testimony on camera. If you are *solely* documenting for evidence or legal accountability, you rarely need to document testimony on camera because preliminary interviews are most often captured in writing. If you decide to press record for advocacy reasons, this section will help make it more likely that the testimony you collect could be used for legal accountability purposes too.

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#### FOR MORE INFORMATION

See how video can be used in human rights advocacy outside the courtroom, as well as in the criminal justice process, in "The Role of Video Beyond the Courtroom" at [vae.witness.org](http://vae.witness.org).

# PART I

## PRELIMINARY FIELD INTERVIEWS V. COMPREHENSIVE INTERVIEWS

### Types of Interviews

There are two basic types of witness interview: preliminary field interviews and comprehensive interviews. The characteristics and goals of each are described below.

#### Preliminary Field Interview

A short interview, often done at the scene of the incident, designed to obtain important information that a professional investigator will need during the early stages of an investigation. This type of interview tends to be conducted in the midst of a human rights incident or in the immediate aftermath, while the details are fresh in the interviewee's mind.

The primary goals of a preliminary interview are to obtain

- basic, factual information about the incident — who, what, when, where, how, and sometimes why;
- information that will help identify other witnesses and evidence and provide solid leads that an investigator could pursue (in either the short or long term) in their efforts to reconstruct what happened; and
- enough contact information so that a professional investigator can get in touch with the interviewee to follow up with a comprehensive interview if necessary.

#### Comprehensive Interview

A longer, more thorough interview in a safe, comfortable environment, separated in time and space from the incident.

The primary goals of a comprehensive interview are:

- to find out everything the witness knows about the event;
- to gather information in order to evaluate the truthfulness and accuracy of the witness's statement;
- to learn if there are additional witnesses or physical evidence the witness knows of; and
- to gather sufficient background information to enable locating the witness in the future (e.g., current address, social media handles, contact information of relatives who will know where the interviewee is should he or she have to move).

**If you are a locally based frontline documenter and/or first responder, you will only be conducting preliminary field interviews. This will be our focus for the rest of this section.**

If you are interested in improving your interviewing skills and learning more about conducting comprehensive interviews, see the Additional Resources section at the end of this document. However, keep in mind that, no matter how proficient you become, the investigator working the case must always complete his or her own comprehensive interview.

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## KEY POINT

The goal of a preliminary field interview is not to get a full, detailed statement but to collect reliable information that is complete enough to provide professional investigators with solid leads, in a manner that is effective and ethical. If the interview provides leads and helps an investigator determine whom to complete comprehensive interviews with and what to ask during those interviews, then you have been successful.

### Types of witnesses

There are typically three categories of witnesses that can provide preliminary information at the scene of the incident or shortly thereafter: **bystanders, victims, and persons who know or have knowledge of the victims**. In traditional human rights investigations, these individuals are considered key witnesses because they have invaluable information about the violations committed. Key witnesses can provide details of the crime (such as how many perpetrators there were, what type of weapons were used, what time the events happened, how many victims there were, and the extent of property damage). However, they may not be able to provide the information required to demonstrate the involvement of those who bear the most responsibility for the crime. Legal teams often need to rely on linkage evidence or notice evidence to prove who ordered the attacks or allowed them to happen.

There are three additional categories of witnesses you should be aware of: **insiders (also known as whistleblowers), suspects, and experts**. As a frontline documenter, it's unlikely that you will conduct preliminary interviews with anyone from these three categories; however, during prolonged mass-atrocity situations, there are times when activists will find themselves in a face-to-face conversation with these individuals. Specific guidance on how to interview insiders, suspects, and experts is beyond the scope of this section, but if you do find yourself in this situation, the principles included here apply.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

To learn more about crime-based and linkage evidence, see “Anatomy of a Crime” and “Proving Responsibility: Filming Linkage and Notice Evidence” at [vae.witness.org](http://vae.witness.org).

## KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

Witnesses are an essential part of any investigation and court case. No matter how much evidence is gathered, without witnesses to explain its relevance, a successful prosecution is unlikely. That said, witnesses can be challenging sources of information, and interviews that are not conducted properly can undermine investigations and compromise your work to secure accountability.

Here are some of the major challenges one faces in working with witnesses:

**Everyone makes mistakes.** Human memory is imperfect. Numerous studies show that eyewitness testimony tends to contain inaccuracies despite the very best intentions of the witness. Additionally, traumatic experiences can further inhibit a witness's ability to accurately recall events. For example, studies show that when a person witnesses a crime where a weapon (like a gun or knife) is used, their focus tends to be on the weapon. As a result, their ability to remember other details about the crime is reduced.

**We all have biases.** Cultural upbringing, religious beliefs, political affiliations, gender, educational background, socio-economic class, status, and age can all influence our biases. Since people are wired to see things from their own perspectives, even two people standing side by side during an event will experience it differently.

Consider some examples of how this might come into play:

- If two religious groups are embroiled in a conflict and you are interviewing in an area where only one group lives, the testimony will be biased toward the beliefs of that one group.
- The testimony of police officers is often trusted over the testimony of the accused.
- People who hold shares in a company that has been accused of wrongdoing may consciously or unconsciously protect the company, because they have a financial stake in the outcome of the case.

**Acting as a witness can be time-consuming and emotionally exhausting.** Witnesses may be greatly effected by the amount of time and energy required to participate in a case or trial. Participation can substantially disrupt their personal relationships, their jobs, and their own well-being. Additionally, they may be thrust into the media spotlight in intense or undesirable ways. It is important to ensure they are aware of these possibilities and choose to participate in spite of the risks.

# PART II

## CHOOSE YOUR METHOD OF DOCUMENTATION

Imagine yourself at the scene of a car-bomb explosion in front of a school, in a community where bulldozers are illegally demolishing houses, or at a worksite where an international corporation is violating safety standards and employees are working in dangerous conditions. You want to interview witnesses about the human rights violations either at the scene or a short distance away. Should you conduct the interviews on camera or not? Here's some guidance to consider.

### Key Principles

#### Principle 1: Do No Harm

Under all circumstances, frontline documenters must strive to “do no harm” when asking individuals to provide information about a human rights incident. In some cases, individuals, their families, or their communities may be put at risk simply by being in the presence of or in contact with a frontline documenter who is collecting testimony. Capturing testimony on video increases the possibility that the interviewees will be identified as cooperating with advocates for accountability, which may amplify the risks they will face should the video fall into the wrong hands or be seen by the wrong person.

Frontline documenters must make every effort to avoid causing harm when doing monitoring work. This means constantly balancing the need for information with the potential risk of harm to those who provide such information. In some circumstances, this may mean that you forgo the collection of information.

At minimum, frontline documenters need to

- understand the risks involved in the collection of information;
- ensure interviewees give their informed consent to participate in the interview;
- protect the information documented;
- take special precautions when working with children, persons with mental disabilities, survivors of sexual violence and other trauma, and other vulnerable populations; and
- to the extent possible, seek further guidance and training that will help you with your interviewing efforts.

Additional strategies to ensure that the principle of “do no harm” is honored during the interview process are woven throughout this section.





## Principle 2: Lead Evidence Only

It's important to understand that testimony collected or recorded by frontline documenters in the field can — and often does — serve as valuable lead evidence. Lead evidence is information that leads us to believe a crime may have happened. That information alone, however, is not sufficient to determine whether a crime actually happened. Further research must be done to determine whether an investigation should be launched.

It is also important to know that rarely — if ever — will interviews collected by frontline documenters be used in a courtroom, because of two key legal doctrines:

**Preference for Live Testimony.** Judges prefer that witnesses testify in person, because this makes it easier to evaluate the credibility of the witness and discourages false testimony. There are rare exceptions to this in which live testimony is not required, but it is much preferred.

**Right to Confrontation.** Most criminal tribunals give the accused the right to have a face-to-face confrontation with witnesses who testify about the accused's participation in the alleged crime. This is sometimes referred to as the “right to confrontation and cross-examination.” Accordingly, witnesses need to be informed that they may someday have to testify in court in the presence of the accused.

Even though preliminary interviews are not likely to be used in court, this does not mean they are not valuable for advocacy purposes or in the early stages of an investigation.





## KEY DECISIONS

### TO INTERVIEW OR NOT? TO PRESS RECORD OR NOT?

- 1) “Should I interview this person or not?”
- 2) “Should I record this interview on camera or write down the information provided?”

#### Question 1:

To determine whether to interview the person – for either accountability or advocacy – discuss the following with the interviewee before documenting an interview in any way. Ask if an interview will

- threaten the interviewee’s safety and security or the safety of their family or community;
- violate their right to privacy;
- infringe upon their dignity; or cause the interviewee to be re-victimized.

If any of the above might happen, you should not proceed with the interview.



#### QUESTION 2:

If, after considering the above, you decide to complete a preliminary field interview for accountability purposes, then you will need to determine whether video (or audio) is the appropriate choice or whether you should instead document the testimony in writing. Consider the issues outlined below.

# PRELIMINARY INTERVIEW: ON CAMERA OR IN WRITING?

## REASONS TO DOCUMENT PRELIMINARY INTERVIEWS IN WRITING

**Expediency:** An investigator, analyst, or lawyer can quickly scan written interview notes and summaries to find the key information they seek. With video, they must review the entire video to find the information they need. This can prove to be very time-consuming. If you do use video, it is best to pair the video file with a synopsis of the interview, a full transcription of the interview, and a summary of the file's metadata. Although new technologies are being developed to automate the transcription of video, transcriptions can still be time-consuming and/or expensive to complete.

**Interviewer Skill:** Interviewing eyewitnesses to a crime is a specialized skill; if you decide to press record, the mistakes you make as the interviewer will be captured as well. Witnesses are a critical part of every case, and an improperly conducted interview – even if the interviewer has good intentions – can permanently compromise the possibility of the witness providing further information to investigators, lawyers, and courts, resulting in the exact opposite result you are striving for.

**Consistency:** Each time a witness recounts an incident, their recollection contains small, unintentional changes; stories are never told exactly the same way twice. If an interview is recorded and then weeks, months, or even years later the interviewee is asked to testify in court, inconsistencies between the recorded interview and in-court testimony could undermine the witness's credibility. If the interviewer writes down what the interviewee says in notes, it will be more difficult for the opposition to identify who is responsible for the inconsistencies – the interviewer or the interviewee.

**Safety:** While any interview can put a person at risk, written interview notes only divulge a person's name along with their testimony. A video file also includes their face and voice, making them easier to identify.

**Re-victimization:** Some people are uncomfortable providing information about human rights violations on video, and in some situations, a camera pointed at the witness could feel intrusive. Others may have experienced extensive trauma, and the recording of an interview may cause them to feel re-victimized. Watching playback of their interview can also cause trauma. Taking the testimony in writing can help you avoid some of these dangers.

**Informed Consent:** It can be difficult, if not impossible, to secure informed consent when working in the aftermath of a human rights incident. If you cannot secure informed consent, the internationally agreed-upon best practice is to not record the interview. However, should you decide to record an interview without informed consent, keep in mind that written documentation is a better option because there are likely fewer security risks if the person's face and voice can't be seen or heard. See Part V below for more about informed consent and what to do when it's not possible to secure.

## REASONS TO DOCUMENT PRELIMINARY INTERVIEWS ON CAMERA

**Timing & Speed:** During or in the immediate aftermath of a human rights incident, time with witnesses is limited. An interview recorded on video can be accomplished much more quickly than one in writing. The video file can then later be reviewed, analyzed, and transcribed in a calm and secure location.

**Access:** During or in the immediate aftermath of a human rights incident, access to witnesses can also be limited. The situation may make it impractical or unsafe to pull out a pen and paper and take a written statement. There are times when video or audio recording are your only viable options.

**Availability:** Sometimes a key witness may not be available for trial because of relocation, death, or other extraordinary circumstances. In some jurisdictions and under rare and specific circumstances, portions of an interview may be allowed in court without the possibility of cross-examination if the person is no longer available to testify.

**Assessment of Credibility:** A videotaped interview will allow members of an investigation or legal team who are not present in the field to more easily assess the credibility of a witness. Videos show physical affect, voices, location. If interviews are conducted while the incident is ongoing, the video may even show the events in the background. This adds valuable contextual information to the spoken testimony that a written account cannot capture.

**Aid to Memory:** Justice processes can be slow. In many situations it can be months, years, or even decades between the first time a witness gives an interview and subsequent interviews or testimony in court. Testimony recorded earlier on camera could be used to refresh a witness's memory at these later dates.

**Withdrawn Testimony:** Witnesses sometimes withdraw their testimony for personal reasons or because they are pressured to do so. The legal term for this is "recant." If their original testimony is on camera, it may be possible to use it in court under specific circumstances.

**Advocacy:** Finally, as highlighted at the beginning of this section, legal accountability is only one of many valid reasons to interview a witness on camera. You may have other reasons for pressing record.

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## CHECKLIST: TO PUSH RECORD OR NOT?

YES	NO	
		<i>Are there any advocacy reasons to record this testimony in addition to evidentiary reasons?</i>
		<i>Is it logistically easier to film the testimony rather than write it down?</i>
		<i>Is it safe to record a person's identity (name, face, and voice)?</i>
		<i>Is it probable that the person can provide relevant information?</i>
		<i>Is this likely to be the only opportunity for someone to speak with this person?</i>
		<i>Does this person strike you as a credible and reliable witness?</i>
		<i>Is an on-camera interview likely to empower (rather than re-victimize) the person giving the testimony?</i>
		<i>Is the likelihood that contradictory testimony will later be given low?</i>
		<i>Is it possible to secure informed consent? (See details below.)</i>
		<i>Do I have the means to securely preserve this video footage?</i>

The decision to record an interview on camera is generally not an easy one. This is a decision you will need to make based on the information you have at the time. Ideally, you want to be able to answer “yes” to each of the above questions before choosing to press record.

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### FOR MORE INFORMATION

To learn more about lead evidence and other purposes video can serve in the pursuit of accountability, see “All About Evidence” at [vae.witness.org](http://vae.witness.org).

# PART III

## PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICAL TIPS FOR FILMING PRELIMINARY INTERVIEWS

Preliminary field interviews often happen spontaneously, so interviewers often won't have time to thoroughly prepare. That said, if you are reading this, it's likely because you seek to collect testimony as part of your human rights-documentation work. In a spontaneous field interview, it will be challenging to implement all the guidance here, but keep these principles in mind for those times when you find yourself recording in the field.

**Interviews take time, so interview with purpose.** Interviews can be time-consuming, even if the duration of the actual interview is short. It takes time to identify a reliable and credible witness, locate a suitable space for recording, prepare and ask questions, and so on. Additionally, it takes time to carefully organize and preserve the footage, to transcribe the interview, and to review it for relevant content. Be strategic about whom you interview and whether you do so on or off camera.

**Security concerns.** Speaking the truth can sometimes seriously endanger a person's life, their family, or members of their community and, in turn, can influence the answers they give, either consciously or unconsciously. As the interviewer, it is your responsibility to ensure that the interviewee is fully aware of these risks and provides documented consent.

**Remain objective.** Do your best not to let your personal feelings intrude into the interview. Do not communicate your feelings about the interviewee's testimony. You may have strong reactions to what you hear, but these are best processed later, away from the interviewee. If you use an interpreter, make sure they understand this principle too and set their agendas aside when translating the conversation.

**Seek the truth.** If you seek to document for accountability, your role is not to prove that your theory of what happened is right. Your role is to let witnesses share their views of what happened, even if it contradicts your own beliefs. Each account will contribute to getting as close as possible to the truth about what happened. If you capture evidence that suggests someone's innocence, don't fear it. The end goal is to hold accountable those actually responsible for crimes and to ensure the innocent are not wrongly accused. Additionally, if you have information that supports the defense's arguments, it is much better for an investigator or lawyer to know about this evidence early, so they are not caught off guard and can prepare a response to the evidence before they get into the courtroom.

**Interview the person in private.** All interviews, including preliminary field interviews, should be done in private whenever possible so that the information witnesses provide is not influenced by others and does not influence the testimony of other potential interviewees.

**Example:**

In cases of gender-based violence, a woman may minimize the incident or even deny it altogether if her husband is present during the interview. Or, if the first person you interview states that the getaway car was red, and the second interviewee, who thought the car was blue, overhears this answer, the second witness may experience self-doubt and become confused about how to answer.

**Never offer incentives.** If incentives are offered in exchange for testimony, the information the witness provides may be considered untrustworthy.

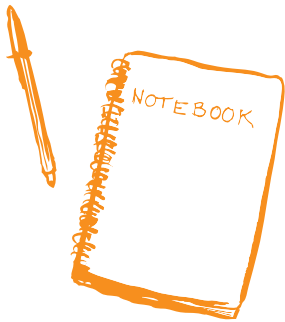
**Examples of incentives include:**

Financial help, assistance with relocation or visa applications, and witness protection.

**Behave ethically.** A thorough discussion of ethical conduct during interviews is beyond the scope of this guide; it is a complex subject and varies from country to country and culture to culture. The bottom line is that, once you decide to collect testimony, it's essential to adhere to the highest ethical standards. Failure to do so will impact the reliability of the information collected, the witnesses' credibility, your reputation, and the reputation of any organizations you work with.

**Take care of yourself.** While it is often hard for a witness to retell the story of a human rights violation, these interviews can also be emotionally difficult for the interviewers and interpreters. Seek emotional support as needed.

**Archive it.** Understanding that you can never be sure if an interview will be valuable, do your best to record only interviews that you plan to save and use to protect human rights. Interviewees often take risks to give testimony. Honor this to the extent you can, taking into account practical limitations such as safety and security considerations and digital storage space.



**FOR MORE  
INFORMATION**

To learn more about archiving video, see the "Activists' Guide to Archiving Video" at [archive.witness.org](http://archive.witness.org).

# PART IV

## CONDUCTING PRELIMINARY INTERVIEWS – BEFORE, DURING, AND AFTER

### Before

#### Step 1: Prepare Your Equipment

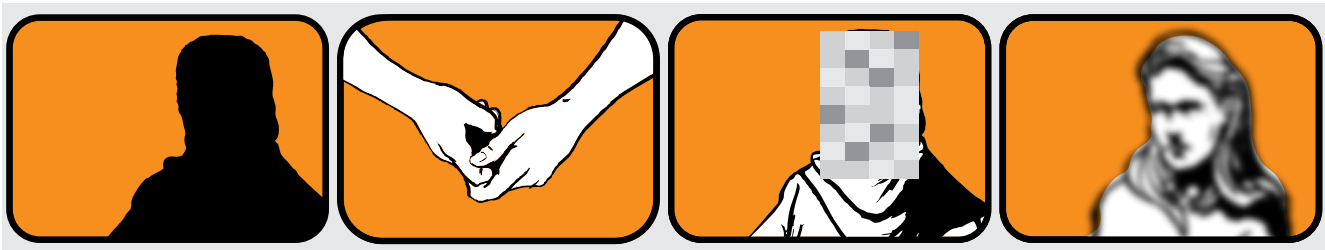
Preliminary field interviews are typically collected in less-than-ideal circumstances, but if you have a small amount of time to prepare your equipment in advance, do the following before you go:

- clear any information off your camera or phone (contact information, files, photos, etc.) that you would not want an authority to have if confiscated;
- charge your camera or phone batteries;
- set the proper date, time, and location on your camera;
- make sure your memory cards have sufficient space;
- test to make sure your equipment is working properly; and
- practice filming with your equipment to ensure you know how to use it properly and can easily do so in field conditions.

#### Step 2: Identify and Minimize the Security Risks

Carefully evaluate the security implications of conducting an interview on video. How might this impact you, your interviewee, or their community? Consult with the interviewee to help identify potential risks and options for minimizing them. Clarify and document what information the interviewee wishes to remain confidential. Consider how and where you will securely store the video files and documentation after the interview. Will you upload them to secure servers via an encrypted Internet connection and then delete the files locally? Will you pass the original files to a trusted ally?

Consider if you need to conceal your witness's identity during the filming process. Know that an anonymous witness can provide important lead information, but their testimony may be less valuable moving forward as a result of their anonymity, because an investigator cannot assess their credibility or complete a follow-up interview with them.



#### Step 3 : To the Extent You Can, Know what You Need to Collect and why

Prepare a list of interview topics or questions with your objective in mind. If you don't have time to prepare questions, know that you want to ask questions about safety in addition to the "who, what, where, when, and why."

## CHECKLIST: KEY QUESTIONS DURING PRELIMINARY FIELD INTERVIEWS

Here's a checklist of key questions to ask during a preliminary field interview:

	<i>What, if any, security concerns do you have? Are there any actions you would like us to take while filming you or afterward to minimize your risks and/or the risks to your community?</i>
	<i>What is your name? Please spell it.</i>
	<i>Could you tell me the date, time, and location of the interview?</i>
	<i>Please state the date, time, and location of the event we will be speaking about.</i>
	<i>Can you describe what happened? How do you know?</i>
	<i>How do you think it happened? Why do you think this?</i>
	<i>Can you tell me to whom it happened? How do you know?</i>
	<i>If you have an opinion about why this happened, could you share your thoughts with us? What is your opinion based on?</i>
	<i>If it's safe to do so, could you share the names and contact information of anyone else at the scene or with information about the event?</i>
	<i>Are there any witnesses you believe we should talk with or any physical evidence we should film (such as property damage, injuries, impact areas, bullet holes, or environmental degradation)?</i>
	<i>Can we or someone else get back in touch with you to follow up or complete a more thorough interview? If yes, how can we contact you? What is your address, phone number, email, and any other key contact information?</i>



#### Step 4: Prepare Supporting Materials in Advance

Supporting materials can be used to refresh an interviewee's memory, but not to prompt a particular answer.

##### Examples:

- Maps may help witnesses more accurately provide details of the location of an event.
- Photographs of common weapons may help them identify a weapon that they do not know by name.
- A calendar can assist with recalling dates.



#### Step 5: Select Witnesses

In many situations, it is simply impossible to interview all the witnesses to a human rights incident. Consider the type of information you are trying to gather and the gaps in information you are trying to fill. Then be thoughtful about whom you interview about what. For example, a witness who is devastated by the loss of his or her family would likely be able to recount the events before, during, and after the attack, but would likely not be well qualified to provide details about the weapons used. On the other hand, a neighbor with military training would be the better person to interview regarding the types of weapons used. Also, consider how many witnesses you need to interview to ensure credibility and compensate for witnesses who may provide mistaken or unclear information.

#### Step 6: Choose a Safe, Private, and Informative Interview Location

When possible, locate a safe, private, and reasonably quiet space to conduct the interview. It can be helpful to find a location that allows the viewer to also see the area where the incidents took place; these background images and sounds may help corroborate the interviewee's testimony. For instance, if the witness is speaking about shelling while shelling is actively taking place, the noises in the background will corroborate their testimony. If the witness is speaking about the intentional burning of an oil refinery, and you can see and hear the flames in the background, this too will corroborate their testimony. The bottom line is that, while it is good to have high-quality images and sound in some situations, it may be better to sacrifice the image and sound quality to capture background information that supports the witness's testimony. This choice will be only yours to make according to the situation and how you hope to use the video.

#### Step 7: Select an Interviewer

If possible, have two people whom the interviewee is comfortable with record the interview — one to handle the technical aspects and the other to ask the questions. When selecting an interviewer, consider their gender and cultural, political, and religious affiliations.

#### Step 8: Make the Interviewee Comfortable

Individuals need to feel comfortable and trust you if you want them to tell you their story honestly. Introduce yourself and explain what you are doing and why. Explain all the aspects of confidentiality, and permit the interviewee to ask questions before starting the interview.

# WHEN PLANNING IS POSSIBLE

Even though many preliminary interviews arise unexpectedly, there are times when a little planning is possible. What follows are a few examples of scenarios in which you could outline a list of interview topics before heading into the field.

## Protests

If your community is planning a protest and you expect that the police will be excessively violent, you can sit down ahead of time and develop a short list of relevant questions that will help to illuminate what happened if violence does occur. For example:

- Was the officer involved with the alleged force on duty or not?
- What happened in the lead-up to the violent encounter?
- How did the assault occur?
- What happened in the aftermath of the attack?

## Elections

If you are documenting an election that is expected to be controversial, you may want to ask witnesses questions such as:

- What was the situation like during the lead-up to the election and while registering to vote?
- What was your experience on election day, both inside and outside the polling stations?
- What were your interactions with election officials like?

If you are working to document a particular violation or build a specific case, consider reading the section on “Collection Planning” (available at [vae.witness.org](http://vae.witness.org)) and developing a relevant set of questions before you go into the field to film.



## During

### Step 1: Secure Informed Consent on Camera

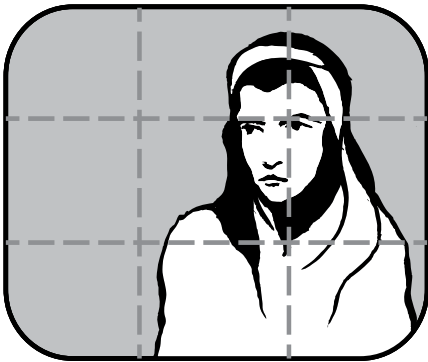
“Informed consent” refers to the filmer’s responsibility to ensure the interviewee knows and fully understands the potential implications to their safety and well-being that may result from agreeing to an interview – especially an interview on camera – and from the future use of that interview. For example, if you are interviewing someone in a remote village in northern Russia where literacy rates are low and access to the Internet is limited, you must do your best to explain how the video will be used, who will see it, and the potential risks the interviewee may face if the video is posted online or becomes publicly available.

The internationally accepted rule is that, when conducting interviews – both on or off camera – with victims and witnesses of human rights abuses, the interviewee’s informed consent must be obtained. Understandably, however, some frontline documenters will find it impossible to secure informed consent in the midst or the immediate aftermath of a human rights incident. Part V explores the challenges around informed consent and what to do if you can’t secure it.

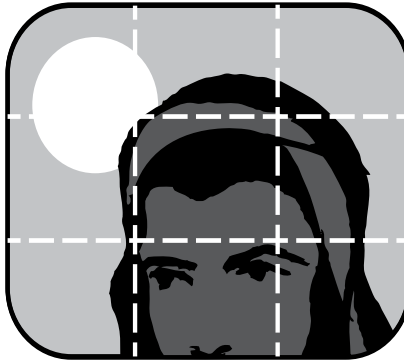
### Step 2: Framing, Lighting, and Sound

Capturing footage with good framing, lighting, and audio increases the chance of its being used in investigations, in the media, or for advocacy purposes, and/or preserved for historical memory. However, it is important to recognize that it can be difficult to focus on these technical aspects while you are filming at the scene of a human rights incident. Make your best attempt to capture clear images and audio so reviewers can easily identify the speaker and location and understand what they are saying. But keep in mind that capturing relevant and useful content is more important than capturing footage that is technically perfect. Even technically imperfect footage may still be valuable for its content.

#### GOOD SET-UP



#### BAD SET-UP



#### FOR MORE INFORMATION

To learn more about camera, sound and lighting techniques, visit [library.witness.org](http://library.witness.org).

### Step 3: Add Objective On-camera Narration

Whenever possible, verbally record the following information on camera prior to conducting the interview:

- your name;
- your contact information;
- the date, time, and location of the interview;
- a one- or two-sentence objective summary describing the incident you are about to discuss with the witness; and
- a one- or two-sentence objective summary describing why you are interviewing this particular person.

## Step 4: Ask the interview questions

**Ask Questions to Solicit Basic Factual Information.** The key questions to ask during a field interview are, first, about safety and, then, about “who, what, where, when, and why.”

**Ask Neutral Questions.** Depending on the situation, you may want to begin the interview with neutral questions to build trust and help the interviewee feel comfortable.

**Ask Relevant Questions.** Be thoughtful about people’s time and ask only questions relevant to the witness you are speaking to. For example, ask a resident who was evicted from their community about how their home was bulldozed without warning or about the compensation they did or did not receive for their home. Save questions about why the community was evicted and who is responsible for a community organizer, an insider, or the person implementing the evictions.

**Ask Open-Ended Questions.** Generally, your questions should be open-ended, as this will solicit a narrative response from the interviewee. These are called TED questions because they begin with prompts like:

- Tell me about ...
- Explain to me ...
- Describe to me ...

**Ask Follow-up Questions.** Also follow up by asking them how they know the answer they are giving is correct. For example, if you ask, “What time did the car bomb explode?”, it’s good to follow up with questions such as “How did you know what time it was?” — not because you don’t believe the interviewee, but because we all have difficulty remembering details correctly during stressful and scary situations. Follow-up questions help clarify what the person is saying and enhance their credibility.

**Acknowledge cultural and language barriers.** The gender, race, nationality, religious group, political party, or socio-economic class of the interviewer — and interpreter if you have one — can impact the quality of the answers provided. If you are working in a team, consider cultural norms and practices and be thoughtful about who conducts the interview and how the questions are asked.

### Examples:

- Time is defined differently in different places, so you may not be able to ask, “How many years ago did the incident take place?” Instead you may have to ask, “How many rice harvests have passed since the incident took place?”
- Family is defined differently too. Instead of asking, “How many family members do you have?” you may have to ask, “How many people eat from your pot every evening?”

**Avoid hearsay.** As the interviewer, it’s your job to ensure the interviewee understands how to provide accurate information. Work with witnesses to help them distinguish between what they know to be true and what they have merely heard from others. In other words, help them distinguish first-hand from second-hand knowledge. If the interviewee did not see or hear something themselves, they can still share the information by stating, “I did not see/hear this myself, but I was told by \_\_\_\_\_ that \_\_\_\_\_ happened.”

**Protect your credibility and theirs.** Any on-camera interview you capture may find its way into the public realm, either intentionally or not. If there is any suspicion that you have tried to put words into someone’s mouth or pressured them to say something, it will call the testimony into question and can permanently taint your own credibility. Therefore, you should avoid leading questions in favor of open-ended ones.

### Examples:

- Leading question: How much over the speed limit was the red car going when it smashed into the gray car?
- Open-ended question: How fast was each car going when the accident happened?

## KEY POINT: FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS

It is good practice to warn the witness before the interview that, after nearly every answer they provide, you will ask a follow-up question, such as “How do you know this?” or “How do you know whom this happened to?” These follow-up questions are perhaps the most important questions during the interview, because they prompt the witness to think carefully, to put the story into a chronological sequence, and to provide corroborating information. In short, follow-up questions make the testimony more trustworthy.

However, this type of question can make a witness feel you don’t believe them or are questioning their recollection. This is why it’s important to make sure the witness understands, prior to recording, that you are not questioning his or her personal credibility, integrity, or recollection. Instead you are asking because their answers will enhance the value of their testimony.

### Example:

**Question:** *“Tell me what you saw when you first walked into the factory?”*

**Answer:** *“I saw approximately 100 people working. They all appeared to be under the age of 14. The conditions they were working in were ....”*

**Follow-up question:** *“Did you say you saw approximately 100 people who all appeared under the age of 14?”*

**Answer:** *“Yes. That is right.”*

**Follow-up questions:** *“How did you approximate that number of people?” and “Why do you believe the workers were under the age of 14?”*

### Step 5: Keep Recording

Unless the interviewee requests that you stop the camera, try to record continuously. The more continuous the footage, the more reliable it will generally be. If you need to stop recording, it’s helpful to say, “We are going to take a break, and the time is \_\_\_\_\_.” Then, when you resume filming, it’s helpful to restate the time, date, and location and provide a concise synopsis of the context before starting the interview.

### Step 6: Interview One Person at a Time

Do your best to interview one person at a time, in a place where the interview cannot be overheard, so that the person is more likely to speak honestly and openly, and so that other interviewees are not influenced by their testimony.

### Step 7: Listen Closely

Be a good listener and keep an open mind. Your objective may change as you listen and learn more about what information the interviewee can provide. Be flexible, and based on their answers, adapt your questions as needed. Allow the interviewee to provide an account of the relevant facts in their own words. Do not interrupt them.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

For an example of what to record prior to an interview, see “Adding Essential Information.” For how to enhance the reliability of your footage through filming techniques, go to “Filming Secure Scenes” at [vae.witness.org](http://vae.witness.org).

## Step 8: Film Additional Information

In addition to the testimony, you will likely want to capture visual information that corroborates what the person is telling you. If the witness is providing information about an explosion, film the site of the explosion. If the witness is discussing their injuries, ask if you could film their injuries. If the witness is discussing a mass grave, film the grave site. If they are talking about a labor camp, film the camp.

Also try to capture visual information that could help corroborate the date, time, and location of the interview. For example, you could film details such as

- the time and date display on your cell-phone screen;
- the angle of the sun in relation to the horizon or shadows;
- a cultural or natural landmark or a recognizable building;
- a street sign;
- indicators of the day's weather;
- surrounding trees or plants;
- various angles of the interview location.



See the Additional Resources section at the end of this guide for more information about collecting other sources of evidence to support witnesses' testimony, such as documents, still photos, and physical evidence (bullet casings, weapons, human remains, clothing, blood splatter, etc.).

## Step 9: Close the Interview

Before ending the interview, it's good practice to

- Avoid ending with discussion of the witness's worst trauma. Ease them away from the trauma by shifting the conversation to the day-to-day or what comes next for them.
- Give the interviewee the opportunity to ask any questions about the interview, and try to ensure they leave in a positive state of mind.
- State the time that the interview ended on camera.

## After

### Step 1: Revisit Safety and Security

Once the camera is off, check with the interviewee to see if they are aware of any new risks in light of the information that was provided. Make a plan to address any additional risks – for example, concealing a person's identity by using editing tools.

### Step 2: Develop Next Steps

If you have a plan in place, inform the interviewee of what will happen next. Consider whether you should pass this interview along to an investigator, share it with the media, post it online, etc. Did the interviewee give you information that you should follow up on? If so, what is the plan to do so? Is there any other follow-up that you can *realistically* implement?

### Step 3: Provide Follow-up Support

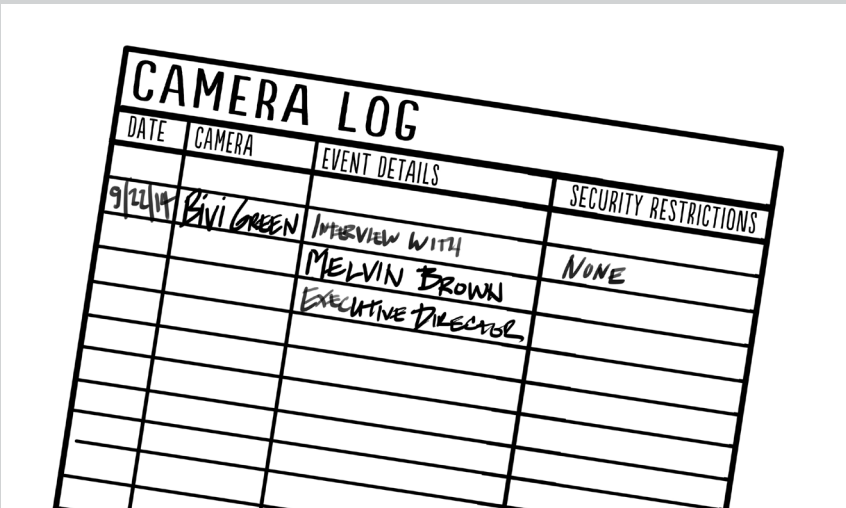
As a frontline documenter, it's improbable that you have the resources to provide any follow-up. If you don't have the resources, don't make promises. No matter what, do not falsely raise an interviewee's expectations. That said, if it is possible and practical to provide the interviewee with information about support options or assistance that may be available, then pass that information along. You may also want to give them your contact information.

When you get back from the field, complete an objective written summary of the interview, highlighting the information you believe to be relevant and important and why you believe it to be so. Remember, gut instincts are often right!



#### Step 4: Summarize It

When you get back from the field, complete an objective written summary of the interview, highlighting the information you believe to be relevant and important and why you believe it to be so. Remember, gut instincts are often right!

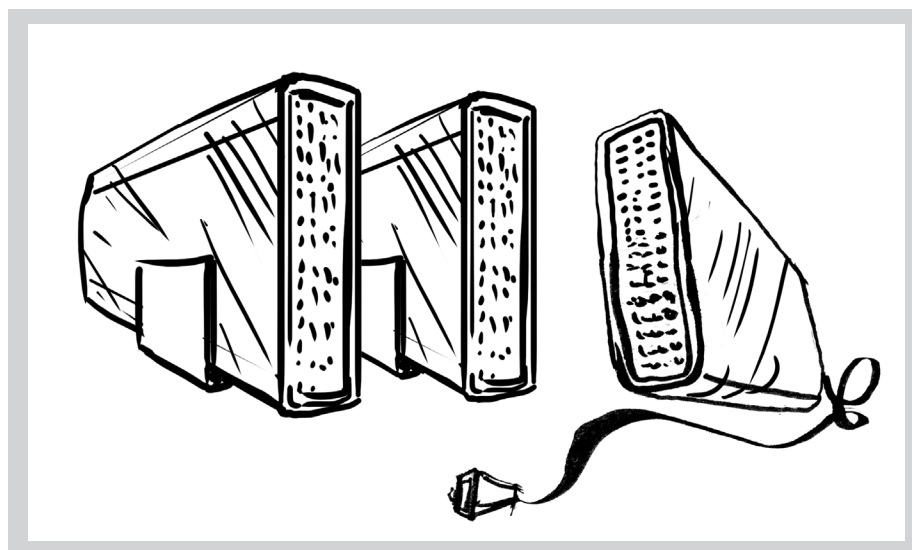


DATE	CAMERA	EVENT DETAILS	SECURITY RESTRICTIONS
9/22/14	BVI GREEN	INTERVIEW WITH MELVIN BROWN EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR	NONE

FILMING

#### Step 5: Archive and Protect It

Archive the testimony and protect it from being used in ways that are not authorized. If possible, seek expert help to ensure your footage is protected and won't fall into the wrong hands.



#### Step 6: Learn From Your Experience

Consider what you learned from the experience, so you may improve your interviewing efforts the next time you go into the field.



# PART V

## INFORMED CONSENT

### What is informed consent?

*Informed Consent* is the interviewee's agreement to be filmed and can only be provided after they fully understand

- who you are;
- the purpose of the interview;
- what you hope to achieve with the interview and what you cannot achieve;
- the risks of providing the testimony;
- how and where the video will be used;
- who will see it;
- how you will protect their privacy and security; and
- what you can provide and not provide. For example, most frontline documenters are not in a position to assist in relocation, visa applications, finances, or witness protection.

The internationally agreed-upon standard is that informed consent must be secured when taking testimony in writing, via audio recording, or via video recording. This is a clear recommendation that this Field Guide supports. However, in the field at the preliminary-interview stage, it can be impractical – or even impossible – to follow this recommendation. Accordingly, we will first discuss how to secure informed consent and then address what to do when securing consent is not possible.

### Elements of informed consent

The concept of “informed consent” is rooted in four fundamental principles. These principles help us understand the legal definition of consent and the moral obligation of human rights documenters and organizations to protect the safety, security, and dignity of interviewees.

- **Disclosure:** The purpose and intended use of the information sought must be explained fully in order to protect the interviewee's safety to the greatest extent possible and to maintain an honest relationship between interviewer and interviewee.
- **Voluntariness:** The interviewee must give permission for the material to be used and express whether he or she is willing to be identified by name; this must occur in conditions that allow them to give their consent voluntarily. For example, they should not be coerced by promise of payment or additional protection.
- **Comprehension:** The interviewee must understand the implications of the interview. This may be complicated if the interviewee does not have a full understanding of the intended distribution— that it may reach the International Criminal Court, for example. The interviewer must find a balance, avoiding condescension but also protecting the interviewee's safety.
- **Competence:** The interviewee must be capable of fully comprehending the implications of his or her participation. This is an especially important issue with vulnerable individuals such as children, people with mental disabilities, and people who have suffered significant trauma (sexual violence, for instance).

### Why secure informed consent?

Securing informed consent is essential to ensuring that the interviewee knows the possible repercussions of agreeing to be interviewed. Identifying the worst-case scenario allows the interviewer and interviewee to devise a plan to minimize the risks to safety and security for themselves and those around them. The provision of informed consent also honors the human rights principle of agency and allows an interviewee to make an empowered decision to give the interview or not.

#### FOR MORE INFORMATION

For sample informed-consent policies and forms, go to [bit.ly/ExamplesInformedConsent](https://bit.ly/ExamplesInformedConsent).

# CHECKLIST: SECURING INFORMED CONSENT – BEFORE FILMING

Informed consent can be documented on paper, on camera, or both. Documenting an expression of consent on camera is recommended, because it better ensures that the proof of consent and important security stipulations will not get separated from the footage.

The checklist below is a guide to documenting informed consent on camera. Modify this checklist

- to meet the specific legal requirements of the country where the filming is taking place;
- to honor cultural practices and ethical considerations in the region; and
- as necessary based on the on-the-ground situation.

FILMING

*BEFORE THE INTERVIEW – Begin with an off-camera conversation to establish that your interviewee understands:*

	<i>Who the filmer and crew are and your roles.</i>
	<i>The purpose of the interview.</i>
	<i>Why they will be continually asked explain their responses.</i>
	<i>The implications of speaking out.</i>
	<i>Who may potentially see the video.</i>
	<i>How the video will be used and shared.</i>
	<i>That the interviewee may be asked for a more detailed interview or, in some cases, to testify in court.</i>
	<i>That participation is voluntary.</i>
	<i>That no incentives will be provided.</i>
	<i>That they can cancel their permission during the interview, and the video can be deleted on the spot; if they rescind permission after the interview, logistical and legal realities may make it impossible to delete the testimony.</i>

## CHECKLIST: SECURING INFORMED CONSENT – DURING FILMING

*ON CAMERA – Now turn to the camera, and before beginning the questions about the incident, ask the following:*

	<i>If the security situation allows, please state your name and the date and location of this interview.</i>
	<i>Please explain what we are doing in your own words.</i>
	<i>Can you tell me who may see the video and how it will be shared?</i>
	<i>Can we show your face and use your real name and voice in this video?</i>
	<i>Are there any other restrictions to using and sharing this interview that we need to be aware of?</i>
	<i>Are you aware that your participation is voluntary and that you can refuse to answer any question and end the filming process at any time in order to ask questions, take a break, or stop completely?</i>
	<i>Were you informed that no incentives will be provided for your testimony and that we cannot assist with any follow-up services?</i>
	<i>Were you informed that you might need to make yourself available for a further, more detailed interview?</i>
	<i>If applicable, were you informed that there is a possibility that you may be called to testify before a court? (As a frontline documenter, it's impossible for you to say with certainty whether a person will be called to testify in court. However, if you think that might be the case, be honest about it.)</i>
	<i>Do you consent to your interview being used in the manner discussed?</i>

FILMING

## CHECKLIST: SECURING INFORMED CONSENT – WRAPPING UP

*TOWARDS THE END OF THE INTERVIEW – with the camera still recording, ask the interviewee the following:*

	<i>Would you like to make any corrections or add any additional information?</i>
	<i>Have there been any threats, promises, or inducements which influenced your answers?</i>
	<i>Is the statement you gave true to the best of your knowledge and recollection?</i>
	<i>Do you have any additional safety concerns considering what you shared?</i>
	<i>What is the best way to follow up with you if needed?</i>

*AFTER THE INTERVIEW – With the camera turned off consider the following:*

	<i>Properly document and preserve the footage in a safe and secure location.</i>
	<i>Determine whether you will share the footage, and if so, with whom, when, and how?</i>
	<i>If needed and if you are able to, provide contact information for a counselor or victim-support services.</i>

FILMING

## When securing informed consent is not possible

The internationally accepted practice is that informed consent must be secured when collecting testimony, either in writing, with an audio recorder, or on camera. However, obtaining informed consent takes time and there are field situations where it may be impractical – and even risky – to complete the process outlined above, because you simply don't have the time to explain everything in the midst or immediate aftermath of a protest, an air strike, or a forced eviction, on election day, or while in a person is in the process of migrating.

The decision to capture testimony without obtaining fully informed consent is a judgment that only you can make based on the information you have available to you at the time. **Keep in mind that if you decide to record an interview without informed consent, you are also taking on the obligation to protect the interviewee's physical security, privacy, and dignity to the extent you can, so that no harm comes to them as a result of the interview.**

When you find yourself in a position where it's impossible to secure a person's informed consent, at the *very minimum* you should ask the interviewee the following questions:

- What, if any, security concerns do you have?
- Are there any actions you would like us to take while filming you or afterward to minimize your risks and/or the risks to your community?

Then, before recording any testimony without completing the full informed-consent process, revisit the same questions you asked yourself when deciding whether to capture the interview on camera or document it in writing, looking for as many checks as possible in the “yes” column.

## CHECKLIST:

### TO COLLECT AN INTERVIEW WHEN INFORMED CONSENT IS NOT POSSIBLE?

YES	NO	
		<i>Is it safe to record a person's identity (face, voice, and name)?</i>
		<i>If not, do you have the ability to adequately mitigate the safety risks?</i>
		<i>Do you have a way to safeguard the interviewee's privacy?</i>
		<i>Will the provision of testimony empower (rather than re-victimize) the person?</i>
		<i>Is this likely to be the only opportunity for someone to speak to this person?</i>
		<i>Is there a high probability that the interviewee can provide relevant information?</i>
		<i>Do you have the means to securely preserve the footage?</i>

## KEY POINT

### INFORMED CONSENT: PRELIMINARY INTERVIEWS V. COMPREHENSIVE INTERVIEWS

As a frontline documenter, you will be implementing only preliminary field interviews. In field situations, it is often impractical or impossible to provide interviewees with a complete explanation of informed consent and secure their consent. Although it's not ideal, this is reality. Consider the checklist above when deciding to press record without securing fully informed consent. At the very least, ask about safety concerns.

If you hope to use comprehensive interviews for either advocacy or investigative purposes, you will need to fully implement the informed-consent process outlined here, modified as necessary for your situation.

# ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

## Resources on Conducting Interviews for Human Rights and Media Advocacy Purposes

- *Guide to Interviewing Survivors of Sexual and Gender-based Violence*. WITNESS. <https://library.witness.org/product/guide-to-interviewing-survivors-of-sexual-and-gender-based-violence/>
- *Conducting Interviews*. WITNESS. <https://library.witness.org/product/conducting-interviews-2/>
- *Concealing Identity in Interviews*. WITNESS. <https://library.witness.org/product/concealing-identity/>

## Resources on conducting Comprehensive Interviews

International best practices dictate that all investigative interviews for public and private purposes should be based on the PEACE Model developed by British police authorities in 1994 and since adopted by organizations around the globe. You can learn more about it online; here are a few sources to get you started:

- “The Handbook of Human Rights Investigation” by Dermot Groome. Chapter 7 provides an overview of how to conduct both preliminary and comprehensive interviews. Available online through various booksellers.
- “Documenting Human Rights Violations: A Handbook for Untrained First Respondents.” Public International Law & Policy Group. Forthcoming. <http://publicinternationallawandpolicygroup.org/>
- “A Handbook on Assisting International Criminal Investigations.” Folke Bernadotte Academy. [http://www.mediafire.com/view/h8dk2hknoa7begr/ICL\\_FOLKE\\_Handbook\\_Assisting\\_Intl\\_Criminal\\_Investigations.pdf](http://www.mediafire.com/view/h8dk2hknoa7begr/ICL_FOLKE_Handbook_Assisting_Intl_Criminal_Investigations.pdf)
- “International Protocol on the Documentation and Investigation of Sexual Violence in Conflict,” Part II. UK Foreign & Commonwealth Office. [http://www.mediafire.com/view/2ixoeq82jrbekml/PSVI\\_protocol\\_Documentation\\_of\\_SGBV.pdf](http://www.mediafire.com/view/2ixoeq82jrbekml/PSVI_protocol_Documentation_of_SGBV.pdf)

## Organizations That Offer Professional Trainings

- The Institute for International Criminal Investigations (IICI). <http://www.iici.info/>
- International Investigative Interviewing Research Group (IIIRG). <http://www.iiirg.org/training/>

## Other

- “Making Secondary Trauma a Primary Issue: A Study of Eyewitness Media and Vicarious Trauma on the Digital Frontline.” Eyewitness Media Hub. <http://eyewitnessmediahub.com/research/vicarious-trauma>
- *Activists’ Guide to Archiving Video*. WITNESS. <http://archiveguide.witness.org/>

END NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> “Handbook of Human Rights Investigations” by Dermot Groome.



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**PRINT OUT THE MINI GUIDES BELOW AND CARRY THEM  
WITH YOU FOR EASY REFERENCE.**

# FILMING PRELIMINARY INTERVIEWS

## V. COMPREHENSIVE INTERVIEWS

### A preliminary Field Interview is typically (but not always)...

- collected by a frontline documenter;
- conducted in the field, either during or shortly after an incident;
- captured in a spontaneous manner;
- shorter in length;
- intended to collect basic information; and
- to help identify if there are additional witnesses or physical evidence the witness is aware of.

### A comprehensive interview is typically (but not always)...

- collected by a trained human rights advocate or investigator;
- conducted in a safe, comfortable environment;
- separated in time and space from the incident;
- captured in a planned manner;
- longer in length;
- intended to collect thorough information about everything the person can remember; and
- to learn if there are additional witnesses or physical evidence the witness is aware of.

# FILMING PRELIMINARY INTERVIEWS

## V. COMPREHENSIVE INTERVIEWS

### PRELIMINARY FIELD INTERVIEW



### COMPREHENSIVE INTERVIEW



# FILMING PRELIMINARY INTERVIEWS

## CHECKLIST: TO PUSH RECORD OR NOT?

The decision to record an interview on camera is generally not an easy one. This is a decision you will need to make based on the information you have at the time. Ideally, you want to be able to answer “yes” to each of the above questions before choosing to press record.

YES	NO	
		<i>Are there any advocacy reasons to record this testimony in addition to evidentiary reasons?</i>
		<i>Is it logistically easier to film the testimony rather than write it down?</i>
		<i>Is it safe to record a person's identity (name, face, and voice)?</i>
		<i>Is it probable that the person can provide relevant information?</i>
		<i>Is this likely to be the only opportunity for someone to speak with this person?</i>
		<i>Does this person strike you as a credible and reliable witness?</i>
		<i>Is an on-camera interview likely to empower (rather than re-victimize) the person giving the testimony?</i>
		<i>Is the likelihood that contradictory testimony will later be given low?</i>
		<i>Is it possible to secure informed consent? (See details below.)</i>
		<i>Do I have the means to securely preserve this video footage?</i>

# CHECKLIST: KEY QUESTIONS FOR

## PRELIMINARY FIELD INTERVIEWS

Here’s a checklist of key questions to ask during a preliminary field interview:

	<i>What, if any, security concerns do you have? Are there any actions you would like us to take while filming you or afterward to minimize your risks and/or the risks to your community?</i>
	<i>What is your name? Please spell it.</i>
	<i>Could you tell me the date, time, and location of the interview?</i>
	<i>Please state the date, time, and location of the event we will be speaking about.</i>
	<i>Can you describe what happened? How do you know?</i>
	<i>How do you think it happened? Why do you think this?</i>
	<i>Can you tell me to whom it happened? How do you know?</i>
	<i>If you have an opinion about why this happened, could you share your thoughts with us? What is your opinion based on?</i>
	<i>If it's safe to do so, could you share the names and contact information of anyone else at the scene or with information about the event?</i>
	<i>Are there any witnesses you believe we should talk with or any physical evidence we should film (such as property damage, injuries, impact areas, bullet holes, or environmental degradation)?</i>
	<i>Can we or someone else get back in touch with you to follow up or complete a more thorough interview? If yes, how can we contact you? What is your address, phone number, email, and any other key contact information?</i>

# CONDUCTING PRELIMINARY INTERVIEWS

## BEFORE FILMING

- STEP 1 prepare your equipment
- STEP 2 identify and minimize the security risks
- STEP 3 know what you need to collect and why
- STEP 4 prepare supporting materials in advance
- STEP 5 select witnesses
- STEP 6 chose a safe, private, and informative interview location
- STEP 7 select an interviewer
- STEP 8 Make the interviewee comfortable



# CHECKLIST:

## SECURING INFORMED CONSENT

## BEFORE FILMING

Begin with an off-camera conversation to establish that your interviewee understands:

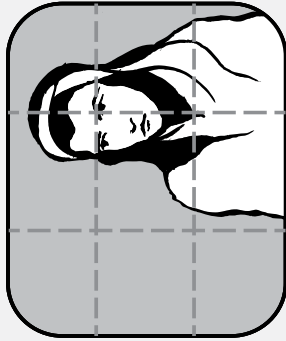
	Who the filmer and crew are and your roles.
	The purpose of the interview.
	Why they will be continually asked explain their responses.
	The implications of speaking out.
	Who may potentially see the video.
	How the video will be used and shared.
	That the interviewee may be asked for a more detailed interview or, in some cases, to testify in court.
	That participation is voluntary.
	That no incentives will be provided.
	That they can cancel their permission during the interview, and the video can be deleted on the spot; if they rescind permission after the interview, logistical and legal realities may make it impossible to delete the testimony.

# CONDUCTING PRELIMINARY INTERVIEWS

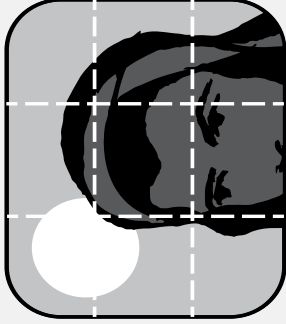
## DURING FILMING

- STEP 1 secure informed consent on camera
- STEP 2 consider framing, lighting, and sound
- STEP 3 Add objective on-camera narration
- STEP 4 ASK the interview questions
- STEP 5 Keep Recording
- STEP 6 interview one person at a time
- STEP 7 Listen closely and adapt your plan as needed
- STEP 8 Film additional information
- STEP 9 Close the interview

GOOD SET-UP



BAD SET-UP



# CHECKLIST: SECURING INFORMED CONSENT

## DURING FILMING

ON CAMERA – Now turn to the camera, and before beginning the questions about the incident, ask the following:	
	If the security situation allows, please state your name and the date and location of this interview.
	Please explain what we are doing in your own words.
	Can you tell me who may see the video and how it will be shared?
	Can we show your face and use your real name and voice in this video?
	Are there any other restrictions to using and sharing this interview that we need to be aware of?
	Are you aware that your participation is voluntary and that you can refuse to answer any question and end the filming process at any time in order to ask questions, take a break, or stop completely?
	Were you informed that no incentives will be provided for your testimony and that we cannot assist with any follow-up services?
	Were you informed that you might need to make yourself available for a further, more detailed interview?
	If applicable, were you informed that there is a possibility that you may be called to testify before a court? (As a frontline documenter, it's impossible for you to say with certainty whether a person will be called to testify in court. However, if you think that might be the case, be honest about it.)
	Do you consent to your interview being used in the manner discussed?

# CONDUCTING PRELIMINARY INTERVIEWS

## AFTER FILMING

- STEP 1Revisit safety and security
- STEP 2Develop next steps
- STEP 3Provide follow-up support if possible
- STEP 4summarize it
- STEP 5Archive and protect it
- STEP 6Learn from you experience



Learn more about preserving video at [archive.witness.org](https://archive.witness.org)

# CHECKLIST: SECURING INFORMED CONSENT

## AFTER FILMING

TOWARDS THE END OF THE INTERVIEW – with the camera still recording, ask the interviewee the following:	
	Would you like to make any corrections or add any additional information?
	Have there been any threats, promises, or inducements which influenced your answers?
	Is the statement you gave true to the best of your knowledge and recollection?
	Do you have any additional safety concerns considering what you shared?
	What is the best way to follow up with you if needed?
AFTER THE INTERVIEW – With the camera turned off consider the following:	
	Properly document and preserve the footage in a safe and secure location.
	Determine whether you will share the footage, and if so, with whom, when, and how?
	If needed and if you are able to, provide contact information for a counselor or victim-support services.