

Instructions for using the Zoom H4n Pro for conducting interviews.

Initial settings:

1. Make sure the "Stamina mode" is switched on. This small switch is hidden inside the battery compartment. This will reduce the amount of power consumed by the device, by reducing the number of advanced menu options available. The device becomes simpler to use and more efficient.
2. Have the microphone capsules rotated to 120 degrees. This will make the stereo image of the recording wider, which means that it will capture a wider angle of sounds.
3. Insert an SD card into the right side of the device.
4. (Reformatting the card is a great idea if it is new to you: Menu/SD card/Format/YES)
5. Turn the device on. The small slider switch is on the device's left.
6. Check the battery levels. The icon is on the screen's top right. If necessary, replace the batteries.
7. Do a "Factory Reset" to reset any settings that were changed by a previous user. Press the "Menu" button on the right side, and use the thumb wheel to navigate to: Menu/System/Fac Reset/Yes. Push the thumb wheel to select the options (like "enter"), and push the "Menu" button to go "up" or "back" through the menus.
8. Make sure the Input button on the front is set to "Mic". ("1 and 2" below it refer to the external input jacks at its base, and unless you are advanced enough to be using external mics or mixers, you want the device to use the stereo built-in mics at its front.)

Before you begin your interview, you should take a minute to check that the record levels are properly adjusted. The levels are represented by the bar graph that appears on the main display once you press the red "Rec" button. On the first press, the button flashes red and the levels start registering. You are now in Standby mode (you are NOT yet recording), and can preview and adjust the Recording levels. The graph shows the level of the left (L) and right (R) recording channels. Ideally, you do not want the levels to go all the way to the graph's maximum, at the farthest extent on the graph's right side, as this indicates that your microphones' sensitivity is too high, and the signal is becoming distorted. To correct this, you can increase or decrease the sensitivity of the mics by adjusting the "Rec Level + / - " buttons on the unit's right side. Ideally, the meters should be bouncing between 50% - 80% when people are speaking, and if nothing else, the meters should be a lot louder when people are speaking, and lower when they are not. This is your "Signal to Noise Ratio". Once you have a decent signal level, press the "Rec" button a second time; it will glow solid red, and the timer will begin counting at the top of the screen. You are recording!

Interview set-up

For the sake of simplicity, let's say there are two broad styles of interviews: formal and informal.

Formal

In a formal interview, you will probably try to choose a place that is relatively quiet (low ambient noise), private (few distractions), and comfortable, so both you and your subject are at ease. Most likely you will want to sit across from your subject at a table, with the recorder placed unobtrusively between you. It is probably best to place the recorder on something soft, like its bag (this reduces "handling noise" like bangs or thumps on the table) and facing perpendicular to you and your subject. If you and your subject are also equal distance away from the mic (which is to say the device is in the centre of the table) you should both be picked up evenly, with the questions on one side of the stereo track, and the answers on the other. This will give you more options for editing the material later. If you are positive you will not want to use your voice saying your questions in your final edit, you can also choose to point the device directly at the subject.

Informal

For a more informal, or guerilla-style interview, the assumption is that the interview will be a lot shorter, and that the back-ground noise will be a lot less controlled. You are probably recording "in the field," perhaps because your subject is very busy, and this was the only time they could find, or because you have surprised your subject and asked for an impromptu few words. So long as it is not too overpowering, this background noise is okay, and will make the interview seem more "authentic". In this instance, you might want to hold the recorder like a microphone towards the subject. You can also point it towards yourself when you are asking questions. Remember that this can seem a little aggressive, and might make you both a little less at ease. It is also inherently more dramatic.