

DEVELOPMENT OF INTERVIEW TAKING COMPETENCE BY  
BEGINNER JOURNALISTS WITH THE HELP OF A  
PSYCHOPHYSIOLOGICAL COMPONENT

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**Abstract.** In this article, the authors have researched interview-taking confidence as a necessary component of journalistic work. They have provided analysis of difficulty of interviewing instrument developing. They identify professional and psychological factors that prevent students of departments of journalism and beginners in media sphere to get necessary skills of professional communication. On the basis of a sociological survey, they have proved that beginner journalists realize difficulty of skills that form mastery of an interviewer. They have suggested a solution to the researched problem by qualitative learning of a theoretical component in the process of professional development. The authors have also suggested the recommendations on the application of psychophysiological component, which is an effective tool for overcoming the psychological and physiological difficulties that arise during the development of the competence of the interview.

**Key words:** interview taking competence, theoretical component, beginner journalists, psychological factors, psychophysiological component.

## Introduction

Communication with people is one of three methods of gathering socially significant information in journalistic work, along with observation and studying documents. Professor I. Mykhailyn states: «with certain methaphorism one can say that journalistic work is an everlasting interview, and a journalist himself/herself has to be a good communicator. His/her work consists of talking to people and describing what he/she has heard» (*Mykhailyn, 2011, p. 330*). Sometimes it happens that a camera crew is not on time to shoot material about an event, for example traffic accident or fire, and there are not any documentary traces yet. Thus, conversation with people such as witnesses, victims, firemen, the Emergency Ministry rescuers, officials creates working material for a mass media worker. In reality such communication appears often to be the main and self-sufficient way of getting initial information about a big part of the operative news.

In the context of cited above, in the textbook of the International Institute of Press it is indicated that interview is one of the most important

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instruments that journalists must use for getting information, checking data from the third sources, working out details, explaining facts, and getting opportunity to look at the things from different sides (*Guerrero, 2013, p.122*). Journalists-beginners and especially students of department of journalism realize such feature of media profession. And this fact frightens them. Such reaction is better than surface self-confidence of pushy representatives of media sphere that used to rely on rough assertiveness and familiarity in communication with figurants of their publications. Especially in big cities, beginning media workers feel that their profession demands regular professionally specified communication with competent, respected people and people, who differ from them in their inside world. So, the necessity to get interview taking confidence by journalists-beginners determines actuality of this research.

## Aims

The aim of the article is to research inter disciplined connections between successful developing of interview taking competence by beginner journalists and psychological factors that prevent a beginner of media sphere from becoming a qualified worker.

## Discussion

First of all, a journalist is to be a communicant, psychologist, expert on knowing people. Ideally, he must inspire trust of any person. In the opinion of the authors of Journalistic investigation manual, «warm and open attitude let shorten the distance between a journalist and an interlocutor. And shortening of the distance is one of a necessary condition of confidence and getting the result of journalistic work» (*Biel, 2013, p. 100*).

Ability to create confidential relations with an interlocutor is an important counter-evidence against always popular tendency to overestimate the significance of technical innovations in social communication. Being proficient in using dictaphone, camera or video camera of the newest model does not make a person a good interlocutor. On the contrary, in a journalist-cameraman tandem, the first place is traditionally given to a journalist, whose role is usually taken by a young talkative girl. She is the one who investigates circumstances of an event, reaches agreement with the figurants of the story about shooting interviews, tells the cameraman what shots should be in the future reporting story.

Hesitation of media beginners and their fear of an interview as professionally specified communication with socially significant people can be explained by the fact that students of department of journalism do not know what about and how it is necessary to talk to people preparing materials for mass media. As a result, there is a feeling that for a beginner journalist it is difficult to develop one of the most important professional competences, which is taking interview. Most often they have difficulties preparing portrait sketches and expert analytical materials.

In the English language the word «interview» indicates a large specter of varieties of professionally specified communication from a dialogue between a polyclinic doctor with a patient to a job interview. In all social sciences an

interview becomes more and more important method of gathering statistical, sociological, psychological information. Besides, academic experts of journalism and practitioners of the media sphere of Western and post-Soviet countries unanimously admit that the art of interviewing heroes of their materials is one of the fundamental features of a journalist, if not the main one. American researches have calculated that interview consumes from 80 to 90% of their working time, but more often than other methods it gives materials for publication, because the documents, used for preparing media materials, will not substitute people's testimonies (*Lukina, 2012, p. 7*).

Ambivalence of an interview can be seen in its functional duality being at the same time a method of gathering journalistic information and a genre of publications (*Grigoryan, 2007, p. 26*). A. Kolesnichenko thinks that «dual nature of interview also reveals itself in its simplicity and difficulty at the same time. The simplicity is in the fact that every person can ask questions and note answers, but not every journalist can get an individual talking, open him/her and lead up to certain formulations, spice up a conversation and add dynamic to it.» Even professionals admit that sometimes they have very hard interlocutors and failed interviews (*Kolesnichenko, 2013, p. 90*).

Analytics pay attention to a tendency of democratization of relationships between a journalist and an interviewee. Informational invasion forms a social demand for an explanatory role of media, the help in orienting in the sea of news and assessments. So, the role of a journalist as a guide in a socially significant subjects grows. More and more often journalists initiate dialogues with experts of social tendencies and witnesses of important events, try to estimate their words and hold discussion with them. This in turn increases many times the requirements to a journalist's competence. A. Ivashchuk pays attention to this trend: «It is obvious, that modern classical interview gradually gravitates toward transformation to a genre of interview, that has a dialogical character». As it has been cited above, this difficult genre is characterized by communication between a respondent and a journalist as equals. On the one hand, it gives an opportunity to a journalist to specify his/her question as much as possible, and if necessary to come back to it once again. On the other hand, the journalist, preparing to such an interview, study the problem and get oriented in its aspects, nuances and implications on the same level as the respondent» (*Ivashchuk, 2013, p. 381*).

In the opinion of A. Fedorova, interview is a difficult type of journalist work, because it requires maximum preparation to the subject and self-restraint in disclosing own knowledge on the topic. Interview requires not only sociability, self-confidence and tactfulness of a journalist in keeping conversation, but also ability to tune in on an interlocutor (*Fedorova, 2014, p. 190*). O. Kuzmenko considers a personality of an interviewer, his/her attitude toward a respondent, his/her level of informational awareness and professional skills to be cornerstones of interview success (*Kuzmenko, 2016, p. 71*). The researchers underline that high erudition and ability to comprehend socially significant problems quickly and independently are essential features of a mature interviewer.

Shortage of interviewing experience of students of department of journalism and beginners of the media sphere should be compensated by fundamen-

tal education that must precede compulsory practical activity in mass media. Education that students look down at and call «redundant and excessive» is to improve lack of life experience, broadmindedness, deep understanding of people and social processes based on society members' actions and words.

A theoretical component will be «a redundant theory» if it stays unused for particular journalist tasks, if a student does not see any sense in developing techniques and methods of professional communication, getting skills of analysis of social life. It is important that, when facing a need to prepare journalistic publications, a student could feel lack of his/her cultural baggage. Having reconsidered his/her view at a journalism as a trade and set of technological solutions, a media-beginner should start growing his/her personal content as a potential professional.

## **Sociological research**

It is important to find out how much beginners themselves realize their need in such skills. For that purpose, we conducted a sociological survey between students of departments of journalism of two institutions of higher education and young professionals of a private TV channel.

The research project «Interview-Taking Competence of Journalists-Beginners» has been conducted for revealing psychological factors of beginner journalists while taking interview. The project was realized by the research group Theophil Babienko Ukrainian Research Society commissioned by V.N. Karazin Kharkiv National University in the second half of 2017– the beginning of 2018.

The aim of the research is getting and processing sociological information of psychological condition of a beginner journalist during taking interview and testing the psychophysiological component.

The object of the research is beginner journalists that work in mass media.

The subject of the research is psychological state of beginner journalists while developing interview-taking confidence.

During the study it is necessary to fulfill following tasks: to find out the reasons that cause fear of beginner journalists before taking an interview, and suggest solution to the problem through personal and professional growth on the bases of a theoretical and psychophysiological component.

Among the research procedures are:

- 1) Analysis of public documents that include description of interview-taking competence, normative aspects of journalistic profession (legislative documents, work standards, ethical codices etc.).
- 2) Four expert interviews with journalists that have been working as editors, teachers and leaders of professional associations for a long time.
- 3) A survey of students of journalism and beginner journalists on a formulized form (printed or electronic form) — 168 respondents.
- 4) A list of methodical recommendations for approbation of the psychophysiological component among beginners journalists during the development of the competence of «interviewing».

Forming of research selection:

Quota formation of selection, «occasional» post survey:

- Sending to databases of mass media (more than 1500 addresses);
- Addressing to some professional journalist organizations;
- Publication in social network profile groups and distribution through public people;
- Addressing to the Faculty of Journalism of Ukrainian institutions of higher education;

Target selection of data:

Addressing to managers of Hope Channel Ukraine.

In addition:

Conducting a survey of beginner journalists and journalists-students of Ukrainian Institute of Arts and Sciences, Kyiv National University of Technologies and Design, young workers of Hope Channel Ukraine. Formation of general research selection is represented in Figure 1.

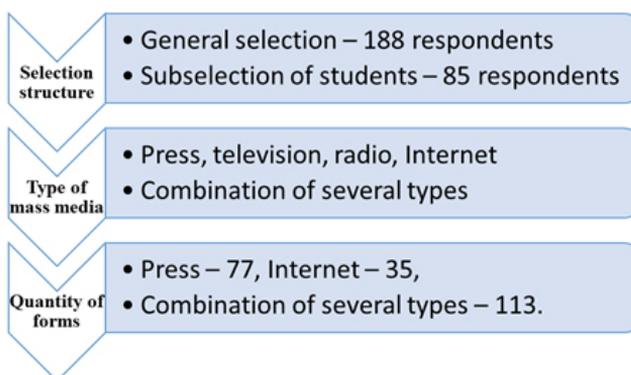


Figure 1. General description of research project selection

Sociological selection for the project «Interview-Taking Competence of Beginner Journalists» was formed to cover the main factological components that are basic for getting initial informational picture during sociological survey. Therefore, we payed attention to the age of respondents, sex and real working experience. In Figure 2. there are basic components of sociological selection of the research project.

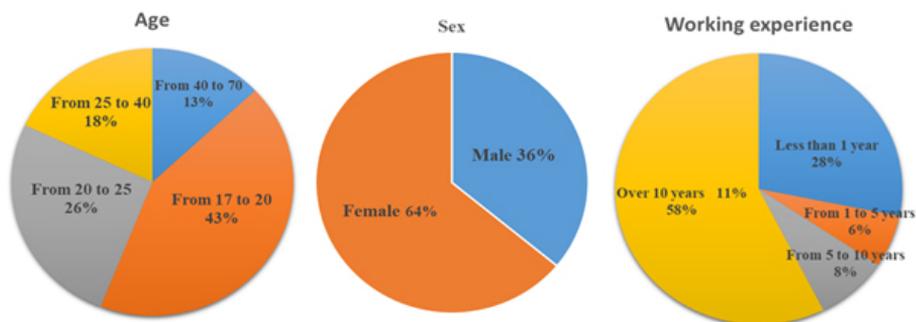


Figure 2. Basic components of sociological selection.

For experimental check of the existing problematics, which is developing interviewing competence, a special database of respondents had been formed that consisted of bachelors, masters and scientists who worked in mass media or taught students a journalist profession. In Figure 3 there is profile orientation of respondents and their quantitative structure.



Figure 3. Profile orientation of the respondents.

Selection is representative, thus, it let us consider the results as manifestation of general opinion of journalism students and beginner journalists. Vision of future journalists and beginner journalists for their profession is completely agreed with the requirements, which are set out in the standard of journalistic profession that outlines the list of requirements for a journalist of multimedia publications and mass media. Beginner journalists think that top-priority

Table 1. Significance of journalist’s activity component according to respondents’ assessments (in %)

| No. | Professional competences of journalists according to the passport of profession | 3 <sup>rd</sup> . year | 4 <sup>th</sup> year | 5 <sup>th</sup> year | Beginner journalist | Average index |
|-----|---|------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|---------------------|---------------|
| 1   | Filling the news section  | 67,2                   | 87,5                 | 91,1                 | 94,7                | 85,1          |
| 2   | Conducting interview  | 22,7                   | 31,8                 | 38,2                 | 44,3                | 34,2          |
| 3   | Editing a text  | 55,1                   | 66,9                 | 79,1                 | 84,9                | 71,5          |
| 4   | Preparing descriptive headings  | 44,9                   | 69,1                 | 74,9                 | 93,7                | 70,6          |
| 5   | Monitoring of different mass media publications                                 | 87,3                   | 90,4                 | 94,7                 | 98,2                | 92,6          |
| 6   | Checking the accuracy of information  | 32,4                   | 55,2                 | 76,8                 | 83,9                | 62,0          |
| 7   | Gathering information on the basis of a survey                                  | 55,2                   | 66,8                 | 78,4                 | 97,9                | 74,5          |
| 8   | Media content promotion   | 9,2                    | 13,7                 | 76,3                 | 88,9                | 47,0          |
| 9   | Analysis of consumer market   | –                      | –                    | 12,5                 | 87,2                | 49,8          |
| 10  | Preparing reports   | 78,3                   | 87,3                 | 90,1                 | 98,5                | 88,5          |

competencies of a qualified journalist are three important characteristics such as 1) organization and implementation of journalist work, 2) formation of informational content, 3) development and support of journalist work at the high level of quality. In Table 1 there are results of a survey on an attitude of students of journalism departments of Ukrainian institution of higher education toward interview-taking competence.

Evaluation of requirements to a modern journalist according to the standard, made by beginner journalists, depends on age and involvement in mass media. Along with growth of academic years, evaluation of personal competencies in the sphere of journalistic activity increases. First and foremost, it is connected with improvement of skills and enlargement of experience in the sphere of journalistic work. Along with this, improvement of interview-taking competence does not exceed 50% even on the level of beginner journalist. It shows that development of interview-taking competence is the most difficult step for most of students and beginners in the sphere of journalism.

To reveal the basic psychological reasons that prevent students and beginner journalists from successful development of interviewing competence, a targeted survey was conducted that let us define problematic moments and give recommendations on their solution. Evaluation (in %) of the importance level of interview-taking competence is made by students and beginner journalists. As it can be seen from Table 1, 83% of respondents realize that taking interview is an important component of journalistic work that is needed to be developed by every beginner of the media sphere. In Table 2, there are the most common psychological factors that, according to respondents' opinion, prevent them from feeling confident in the process of interviewing a respondent.

In the process of analysis of Table 2, following data were determined that show attitude of students of journalism and beginner journalists toward interview-taking competence. The majority of the respondents in most cases prefer working with documents (74,6%) more than live communication with respondents. The main reasons of such choice are own psychological tension (68,1%), difficult character of a respondent (79,3%) absence of additional questions (73,9%), communication with a stranger (78,9%), social status of a respondent (79,8%). Respondents were suggested some variants, what way, in their opinion, it is possible to overcome the mentioned difficulties as soon as possible. The majority agreed with the fact that improvement of practical skills and long working experience can help to solve psychological problems in the process of development a skill of taking interview. It is interesting, that only 24,1% of the respondents consider that a theoretical component is an important part of becoming a professional journalist. According to this, we believe that while teaching journalistic subjects it is necessary for teachers to emphasize not only development of skills in the process of practical work, but also to explain that development of a theoretical component is a guarantor of substantial outlook development of a media sphere worker's personality. Besides, the majority of respondents (89,6%) agree that a highly qualified journalist must develop professional skills in complex including interview-taking competence.

Table 2. The list of psychological factors of journalists-beginners while taking interview

| Psychological factors   | 3 <sup>rd</sup><br>year | 4 <sup>th</sup><br>year | 5 <sup>th</sup><br>year | Begin-<br>ner<br>jour-<br>nalist | Average<br>index |
|---|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------------|------------------|
| <b>What do you prefer in the process of journalistic work?</b>  |                         |                         |                         |                                  |                  |
| Working with documents  | 88,6                    | 73,7                    | 69,8                    | 66,4                             | 74,6             |
| Taking interview  | 7,0                     | 23,2                    | 28                      | 33,5                             | 22,9             |
| Difficult to answer   | 4,4                     | 3,1                     | 2,2                     | 0,88                             | 2,6              |
| <b>Do you like taking interviews?</b>   |                         |                         |                         |                                  |                  |
| Yes   | 10,6                    | 20,7                    | 31,2                    | 40,1                             | 25,6             |
| No  | 89,4                    | 79,3                    | 68,8                    | 59,9                             | 74,3             |
| <b>Have you ever felt uncomfortable while taking interview?</b>   |                         |                         |                         |                                  |                  |
| Yes   | 95,2                    | 89,4                    | 79,3                    | 69,1                             | 83,2             |
| No  | 4,8                     | 10,6                    | 20,7                    | 39,9                             | 16,7             |
| <b>What make you feel uncomfortable most of all while taking interview?</b>   |                         |                         |                         |                                  |                  |
| Own psychological tension   | 89,5                    | 77,4                    | 54,2                    | 51,3                             | 68,1             |
| Difficult character of a respondent   | 92,4                    | 87,7                    | 73,1                    | 64,2                             | 79,3             |
| Absence of additional questions   | 98,4                    | 82,1                    | 63,3                    | 51,9                             | 73,9             |
| Communication with a stranger   | 98,1                    | 89,3                    | 75,6                    | 52,6                             | 78,9             |
| Social status of a respondent   | 99,3                    | 87,2                    | 78,1                    | 54,9                             | 79,8             |
| <b>What helps you to overcome the difficulties while taking interview?</b>  |                         |                         |                         |                                  |                  |
| Long experience of work   | 99,4                    | 98,7                    | 97,3                    | 99,3                             | 98,6             |
| Improvement of skills   | 77,2                    | 79,1                    | 89,7                    | 83,9                             | 81,7             |
| Personal growth as a professional   | 65,3                    | 48,8                    | 87,3                    | 91,8                             | 73,3             |
| Higher education  | 98,3                    | 98,7                    | 98,1                    | 86,4                             | 95,3             |
| <b>What instrument is the most important in learning the art of taking interview?</b>   |                         |                         |                         |                                  |                  |
| Effective learning of theoretical basis of interview  | 12,3                    | 17,9                    | 19,2                    | 47,3                             | 24,1             |
| Constant practice in the sphere of interview  | 98,4                    | 98,5                    | 98,3                    | 99,4                             | 98,6             |
| Natural talent of communication   | 99,4                    | 99,5                    | 99,4                    | 99,3                             | 99,4             |
| <b>A journalistic profession covers a wide range of professional skills, so, in your opinion, is it important to develop all the skills in complex or is it better to do just what you are good at?</b> |                         |                         |                         |                                  |                  |
| Develop all skills in complex   | 87,4                    | 88,5                    | 87,4                    | 95,2                             | 89,6             |
| To do more what you are good at   | 8,1                     | 8,4                     | 8,8                     | 3,7                              | 7,2              |
| Difficult to answer   | 4,5                     | 3,1                     | 3,8                     | 1,1                              | 3,1              |

## Practical application

In order to solve the psychological problems revealed during the survey, a complex of psychophysical exercises entitled «psychophysical component» was proposed, the essence of which is to select and apply them before interviewing. The selection of exercises is carried out individually in view of the temperament of the journalist, since the active temperaments (choleric, sanguine) need to calm down and streamline their thoughts, because these temperaments are excessively verbose at moments of nerves, which may not always be a useful side during an interview. In the case of passive temperaments (phlegmatic, melancholic), excitement and nervousness are expressed in the oblivion of prepared questions, resulting in the journalist being tied to complex questions and unable to use questions that may arise during the discussion (*Nedopitanskiy, 2009, p. 52*). Conditionally, personality of a journalist at the beginning of an interview during interviewing consists of four components, each of which has its negative component, which manifests itself in situations requiring high responsibility, namely interviewing, Fig. 4.

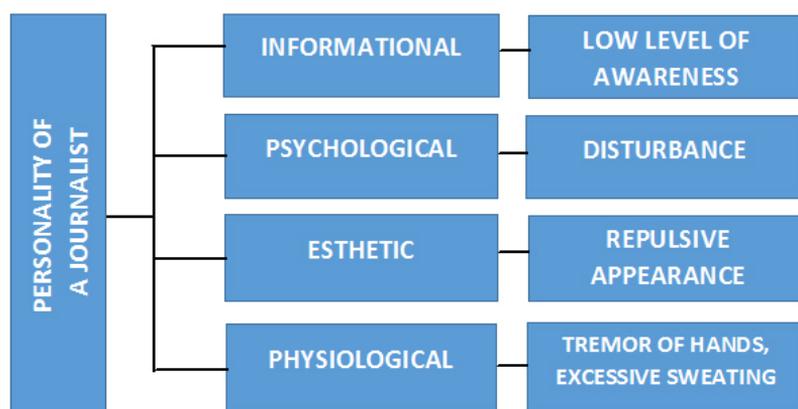


Figure 4. Components of the individual journalist beginner and their negative effects during the interview

The information component of the personality of the journalist beginner includes the general information preparation for the interview, which involves preliminary knowledge of the journalist with the subject, personality of the respondent and the compilation of a number of questions. If a journalist is a beginner who has failed to perform qualitatively these phases, there is a lack of information, which is caused by the emergence of tension between the interlocutors. In order to neutralize this problem, it is necessary to apply three actions, namely:

- 1) General questions in writing (to be applied during the preparation for the interview). Facilitate brain activity and development of atmosphere between the journalist and the respondent.
- 2) Learning and repeating problem questions (necessary for constructing a structured dialogue). This is an appeal to the respondent's feelings and an opportunity for the journalist to gather opinions until the respondent answers the question.

- 3) The lyrical digression should encourage the respondent to tell you information related to personal experience (applied at the time of the emergence of tension). We recommend that you ask the respondent for advice on the issue related to the topic of the interview. The frank interest will enable you to activate and arrange your conversation.

The psychological component of the journalist beginner is manifested in excessive apparent disturbance, which prevents him from feeling freely during the dialogue and causing anger or compassion in the respondent. These components negatively affect the quality of the information received, as the respondent does not feel free to talk and may not deeply cover the questions posed to him. Neutralization of the negative manifestation of the psychological component is performed by means of breathing exercises and facial gymnastics (Sakazli, 2012, p. 37). These recommendations help balance the nervous system and tune in to conversation, since their application involves partial relaxation of the body of the journalist.

The aesthetic component of the personality of the journalist implies the presence of a pleasant appearance in the journalist, as it is easier for people to communicate with those whose faces are acceptable and sympathetic to them. The second aspect of the aesthetic component includes the selection of appropriate clothing, which will not distract the respondent during the interview. A pleasant and well-groomed appearance for 30% increases the effectiveness of the interview (Golub, 2016, p. 67). Everyone has own rules of care and a professional dress code, but they should not go beyond what is allowed. This advice is relevant to every profession.

The physiological component is manifested in trembling hands and disturbance, which is expressed in stuttering and excessive sweating. For neutralization we recommend to perform a complex of light physical exercises, which cause movement of blood in the body and reduce stress. Thus the essence of the psychophysical component can be represented as follows:

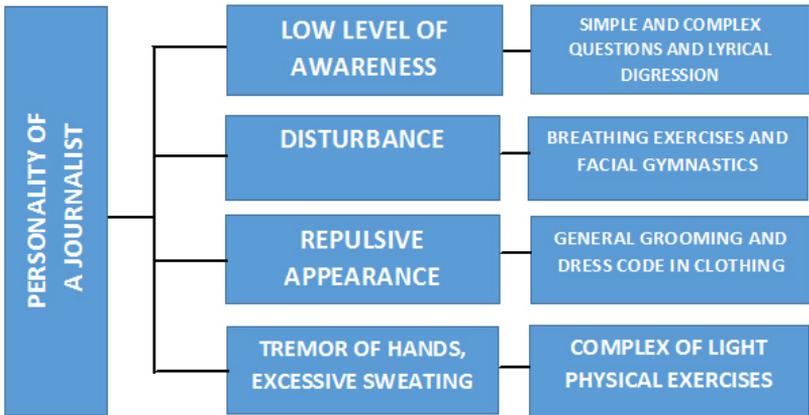


Figure 5. Scheme of application of psychophysical component

After testing the psychophysical components of the journalists, they received the following feedback from the journalists beginners: «I was always worried during the interview and I forgot to put half of the questions that were asked, but after exercising my face before the interview, my excitement

decreased significantly»; «After my beginning to learn to interview, I noticed that during the dialogue I swallowed the ending of words, but using gymnastics for my face helped me overcome this problem»; «It's unpleasant to say this, but the problem of tremor of hands and excessive sweating prevented me from talking with the respondent, because I noticed that my wet hands are an unpleasant aspect when they meet with the respondent; it is the complex of picked up easy exercises that helped me to reduce tremor of hands, although the problem of humidity still left»; «I always liked my style in clothes, but I noticed that respondents who have been reacting to the appearance of my tastes in clothes for over 40 years».

Therefore, from the above, one can conclude that the psychophysical component is an effective tool that helps journalists to overcome the difficulties that arise during the development of the competence of the interview.

## Conclusions

As a result of the conducted theoretical and sociological research, it is possible to make following conclusions:

- 1) Students of journalism and beginner journalists feel psychological tension in the process of development of interview-taking competence.
- 2) In most cases psychological tension is caused by a respondent, if he/she possess a higher social status than a beginner journalist.
- 3) It is possible to overcome psychological discomfort of beginners with the help of two instruments such as development of practical skills and constant usage of a theoretical component.
- 4) The problem of psychological tension was explained by the fact that the majority of the respondents (24,1%) neglected development of a theoretical component, thinking that the discomfort can be overcome with the help of long working experience.
- 5) We recommend to use effectively a theoretical component in parallel with development of practical skills that will let media workers to form substantial thinking, which is the basis of communication with different representatives of the society.
- 6) The use of the psychophysical component in the complex reduces the psychological and physical stress that accompanies journalists beginners when taking the first interviews.

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