Neil
Hello and welcome to 6 Minute English. I'm Neil…

Alice
… and I'm Alice. Now Neil, I'm a big fan of chat shows, as you know. But what do you think makes a good interview?

Neil
I like it when the interviewer asks a question that catches the guest off guard. You know – to surprise them so they're embarrassed and don't know what to say.

Alice
That's not very nice!

Neil
I know. But it's great TV. That's what chat shows are all about, isn't it?

Alice
Well, I don't agree, Neil! A chat show, by the way, is a TV or radio programme where a host – the person who presents the show – talks to guest celebrities about various topics. And what makes a good interview is the subject of today's show.

Neil
So what's a good interview technique, Alice?

Alice
Well, asking open questions – questions the celebrities can't easily respond to with a short answer. Open questions give them the chance to talk and possibly reveal some juicy details about themselves!

Neil
Juicy details means information you find interesting because it's exciting or shocking.
Alice
Yes. So let’s test your interviewing skills, Neil. Ask me something – see if you can get some juicy details.

Neil
OK… Hmm… How much do you weigh?

Alice
How much do I weigh?

Neil
Yeah.

Alice
How much do you weigh? Look, that’s a closed question – you’re going to get a short answer and no juicy details! And more importantly, Neil, it’s a rude question!

Neil
OK – bad choice. Sorry. But your reaction was juicy – you got pretty hot under the collar – and that means embarrassed or angry! I’ll try to think of a better question to ask you before the end of the show.

Alice
Alright then. Now, since you aren’t good at asking questions, perhaps you can answer one instead. Who developed a method of questioning around two and a half thousand years ago that aims to discover hidden truths? Was it…
  a) Hippocrates?
  b) Socrates?
  Or c) Aristotle?

Neil
Well, I don’t know much about ancient history so I’m going to guess c) Aristotle.

Alice
Well, we’ll find out if you picked the right answer later on – but now let’s listen to Larry King talking about the secret of his successful career as a TV chat show host. Can you spot a word that means to get or produce?

INSERT
Larry King, TV chat show host, US
If you ask good questions and you elicit thoughtful answers then you learn more about the person. If the interview’s hard – if I begin by saying, ’Why did you do that?’ I’d make you defensive. That may be thrilling television, but you don’t learn a lot. I learned that the more I drew back, asked good questions, listened to the answers, cared about the guest … you make the camera disappear.
Neil
The word Larry King used is… elicit.

Alice
Right. And you elicited a defensive reaction from me when you asked a not very thoughtful question about my weight. Defensive means protecting yourself from criticism or attack.

Neil
OK, I wouldn't make a good chat show host then.

Alice
You're right there. So good interviewers draw back – or move away – from being the centre of attention. They're good listeners and care about their guests. Sound familiar?

Neil
Are you suggesting that you're a good interviewer?

Alice
Yup.

Neil
OK, well, so why aren't you a top chat show host, hmm? What does Larry mean when he says you have to make the camera disappear?

Alice
It means to make the conversation real – as if you were chatting with a friend – rather than performing to a TV audience. But let's hear more from Larry King on the secret of his success.

INSERT
Larry King, TV chat show host, US
I don't want a 'no'. I don't want a 'yes'. I want a 'why'. So in other words, I want to be a little kind of dumb. My friend Herbie said the secret of my success is being dumb. 'What do you mean by that?'

Neil
So you have to ask dumb – or stupid – questions to make a great chat show host! I knew it!

Alice
Maybe there's hope for you yet, Neil.

Neil
Charming.

Alice
Lovely. OK, here's the answer to today's quiz question. I asked: Who developed a method of questioning around two and a half thousand years ago that aims to discover hidden truths? Was it… a) Hippocrates? b) Socrates? Or c) Aristotle?
Neil
And I said c) Aristotle.

Alice
No, it was b) Socrates. All three were famous Greek philosophers but Socrates was the one who angered lots of important people by his **probing** – or investigative – questions – and this technique is called Socratic Dialogue. Socrates lived from **469 to 399 BC** and he influenced philosophy so much that all previous thinkers have come to be known as Pre-Socratic. Despite this he declared "All I know is that I know nothing".

Neil
Very noble. OK, a final question for you, Alice. What makes you happy?

Alice
Working with such a fantastic co-presenter, Neil.

Neil
That's nice! I'm embarrassed now.

Alice
Can you tell us the words we heard today?

Neil
Of course!

catch somebody off guard
chat show
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open questions
juicy details
closed question
hot under the collar
elicit
defensive
draw back
make the camera disappear
dumb
probing

Alice
Well, that's the end of today's 6 Minute English. Please join us again soon.

Neil
Yes, do indeed!
Both
Bye.

Vocabulary

catch somebody off guard
to surprise someone in a way that often makes them confused or embarrassed

chat show
a TV or radio programme where celebrities talk to their host about various topics

host
a person who presents a TV or radio show and talks to guest celebrities

open questions
questions that can’t be answered with a short answer for example a couple or words or yes or no; they often begin with ‘wh’ (why, what, who etc)

juicy details
information you find interesting because it’s exciting or shocking

closed question
a question where the choice of answers is limited for example to yes or no, or a specific piece of information

hot under the collar
angry or embarrassed

elicit
get or produce something, for example, a reaction

defensive
protecting yourself from criticism or attack

draw back
move away

make the camera disappear
make something real or authentic

dumb
stupid

probing
investigative