



# INTERVIEWING

## HOW TO SCREW UP:

1. Turn off the source; being ill prepared; asking questions you should have looked up; being fearful; being argumentative; carelessness of appearance.
2. Not defining your purpose before you go, resulting in an aimless interview.
3. Asking yes-no questions, vague questions.
4. Not listening; filibustering.
5. Failure to probe, to ask why and how.

## BACKGROUND TO THE INTERVIEW:

1. Be sure you understand your assignment. From that, define the purpose of the interview.
2. Conduct a background search. Remember, you'll get out of an interview what you put into it. Surprise the interviewee with your knowledge of him and/or his field. Be prepared to make him think.
3. Request an interview appointment. Ask in a way that appeals to their self-interest, strokes their ego, excites their curiosity. Tell the interviewee what you're working on and how he fits into the picture. Tell them about how much time you'll need. Give them some time parameters, if possible, and then let them set the exact time (My story is due Wednesday, so I'll need to interview you on Tuesday. I am free beginning at 11 a.m. When would be convenient for us to get together?)

## THE QUESTIONS:

1. Try to get a least 10 good questions before you go to your interview. These 10 questions should lead you to your ultimate interview goal. But be prepared to take the interview off in another direction if you need to. This ability will come from your preliminary research.
2. Use the GOSS formula:
  - Goal Revealing Questions, such as "What are you trying to accomplish?" or "What's the real purpose of your organization?"
  - Obstacle Revealing Questions, such as "What problems did you face?"
  - Solution Revealing Questions, such as "How did you handle the problem?" or "What plans do you have for resolving the conflict?"
  - Start Revealing Questions, such as "When did the program have its beginning?" or "Whose ideas was it?"
3. Remember Bloom's taxonomy: knowledge, translation, application, analysis, synthesis, evaluation. Ask questions all up and down the taxonomy.
4. After each answer, is how or why in order?
5. Don't forget the routine factual questions--who, what, when, where, how, why.
6. Use numerically defining questions:
  - how many students have you flunked over the past 20 years?
  - how many miles has this postman walked?



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- how many hours do you practice a day?
7. Ask your subject to define terms in his own words.
  8. Use the translation level frequently: “Are you saying that.....?”
  9. Ask for chronology.
  10. Prospect for anecdotes. Ask them to give you an example, or tell you exactly what happened on that day. You’ll have to help them flesh things out by asking what time they got up, or what they were wearing, or how fast they drove in what make and model car, or what they ate, or how it smelled or looked or tasted or felt, etc. Also you can ask:
    - what’s the funniest thing that ever happened...
    - what one incident do you remember most...
    - who made the biggest impression on you and why..then describe him or her
    - tell me about a typical day in the life of...
  11. Try to get inside their heads...not just their opinions and their words, but also their feelings:
    - how do you feel when...
    - what was going through your mind when...
  12. To expand answers:
    - use silence creatively
    - ask why or how
    - have them define jargon or other terms
    - restate the answer
    - ask for an example
  13. Use creative questioning:
    - Let’s assume an angel appears at your bedside tonight and offers you one wish regarding your future in athletics. What would that wish be?
    - What if CBS called you up tonight and offered you five minutes to tell why you believe this policy is wrong. What would you say?
  14. At the end, try some devil’s advocate questions:
    - Some people might say that your football program is just using young athletes to raise big money for the school without allowing them to get a good education. What would you say to those critics?

## **BEGINNING THE INTERVIEW:**

1. Be there on time, dressed appropriately.
2. Begin with icebreakers:
  - stuff in the room
  - something they’re wearing



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- use his name; pronounce it right
  - current events in his area of interest
  - mutual acquaintances
3. Your goal is to put the interviewee at ease and cause him to like you and trust you.
  4. Gently work into the interview after no more than five minutes of small talk. Your goal is for the interviewee not to realize when the visiting ended and the interview began.
  5. As you ease into the interview, pull out your notebook or turn on the recorder. But don't announce that the interview has begun. One reported said: "Flipping out the notebook the minute you flush the quarry has never worked too well for me. It scares some subjects. The best excuse I find for breaking out the pad is a big gush of blue-eyes admiration for some happy observation they've just made. I may try, 'Say, that's good. I want to be sure I get that down just right.' And write. The notebook now spells reassurance."
  6. Especially as a college student, you must impress the source. How? The way you're dressed, your professional attitude, your knowledge of him or his subject matter, your lack of fear. This gives him a sense of trust in you that will prompt openness.

## **TAKING NOTES:**

1. Don't worry if you continue writing after he finishes talking.
2. Sit where the source can't see your writing.
3. You can largely control the interviewee by the way you use your pencil. If you stop writing, he'll stop talking. If you want to keep him talking on an area, but you know you'll not use it, takes notes anyway-this'll keep him going.

## **CONCLUDING THE INTERVIEW:**

1. Request documents.
2. Ask if he has any final thoughts. Ask if there's a question he expected but you didn't ask.
3. Ask if you can call back.
4. Stroke him; thank him; if you know when it'll run, tell him.
5. Be alert for post-interview quotes.
6. Divert any requests to see the article. It's against the paper's policy.