



Interviewing and News Gathering Tips


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Interviewing

“Interviewing requires more than a good ear for quotes. It’s a process, like writing, that involves a series of decisions and actions designed to get the best possible information.”

(Chip Scanlan, “Reporting and Writing: Basics for the 21st Century”)

Interviewing



“The success of the end product — the story — is, to a great degree, dependent on the questions a reporter asks along the way. There’s a premium on interviewing skills and competency.”

(Bob Steele, Poynter)

Four Principles

- Prepare carefully, familiarizing yourself with as much background as possible.
- Establish a relationship with the source conducive to obtaining information.
- Ask questions that are relevant to the source and that induce the source to talk.
- Listen and watch attentively.

Interviewing

- If you're a good listener, you can be a great interviewer.
- When all is said and done, an interview is simply a purposeful conversation.
- Interviewing is a social skill.
 - You must be friendly, but aggressive.
 - Polite, but probing.
 - Sympathetic, but skeptical.

Types of Interviews

- News
- Profile
- Investigative
- Broadcast



Advantages/Disadvantages of Interviews

- In person
- By phone
- By email

Interviewing Preparation

- When you get your assignment, you should immediately determine your sources.
- Take time to hone up on your subject or the topic you'll be discussing.
- Try to know almost as much as they do about your subject or the topic you'll be discussing.
 - Who are the experts?
 - Who has the information you need?
- Make sure you interview sources who will represent both sides of the story.

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Interviewing preparation

1. Complete your research so you can ask intelligent questions.
2. Take time, however short, to brush up on your subject or the topic you'll be discussing.
3. Try to know almost as much as they do about their subject, so it seems like you'll be chatting with your subject.

Research the Topic

- Current information
- Past newspaper stories/morgue
- Google information (watch validity of sources)
- Understand both sides of topic
- Primary sources
- Secondary sources

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Interview Preparation

- Once you determine best source then you should set up an in-person interview.
 - Don't hide behind desk with phone interviews.
 - Try to avoid email interviews.
- Let them know your media outlet, topic of interview, and amount of time needed.
- Prepare your questions and write them down prior to interview.
- List questions in a logical flow.
- Dress appropriately.

The Questions

- Careful preparation should lead you to a few themes for the interview, and these hint to questions that can be asked.
- But before the specific questions are put to the interviewee, a few housekeeping details usually are should be attended to:
 - Spelling of name (if needed), age, education, job title and description, research, family information, etc.

The Questions

- The housekeeping questions should be your first questions because they are nonthreatening and help to foster a relaxed interview atmosphere.
- Once you have determined the theme/angle of your story, write your questions in a logical flow.
- Focus on open-ended questions.
- Save the tough questions for the

Essential Interview Gear

- Recorder (ask permission)
- Reporter's notebook with your questions
- Pen(s)

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At the Interview

- Arrive early (5-10 minutes)
- Shake hand and introduce yourself
- Small talk (observation)
- Observe surroundings, decor, mannerisms, dress, etc.
- Start with easy questions to ease into interview
- Ask one question at a time
- Listen
- Make eye contact

At the Interview

- Take notes/take shorthand. You **MUST** take notes, even if you have a recorder.
- If source didn't understand question need to ask it again or rephrase it
- If you didn't understand answer rephrase question and ask again or ask for clarification.
- If you don't understand what the interviewee is saying ask for clarification.
 - “Can you put that in terms that our readers will understand?”
 - “I want to make sure that I have this correct, can you please explain that to me, again?”

Interview

- Ask if there is anything else source would like to add.
- Ask when you can get back with them if you have further questions.

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Observations

- Observe and record the person's body language, mannerisms, dress, physical features, distinctive characteristics and interactions with others.
- Observe and record the sights and sounds of the surroundings. These details paint a more vivid picture for your audience and may reveal something that is not being said.

Good Listeners are Great Reporters

- The good listener hears crucial quotes, revealing slips of the tongue, the dialect and diction of the source that sets him/her apart.
- Listens for answers that prompt follow-up questions.
- Let the subject talk. When reporters are talking, no new information is being acquired.
- Listen for inflection. Listen for emotion.
- Listen for what isn't being said.

How to Handle...

- Off the record
- Like to read that before it runs
- Fact-checking
- Follow up

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Note-Taking Tips

- As soon as a theme develops that you are fairly sure will be in your story, put a letter next to it.
- When another theme or idea develops, use another letter to identify it. (A,B,C, etc.)
- As you go along, you should get an idea of the lead theme or idea. Circle the letter that identifies this theme or idea.
- Ask questions to develop this theme if necessary.
- When writing, use the series of similarly marked notes to structure the story. Follow the rule: Like things together in copy.

After Interview

- Go through your notes and type information
- Outline your story
- Determine focus of story/lead
- Write story while the information/
interview is fresh in your mind
 - Enough sources?
 - Missing information?

Usage of Quotes

- Quotes make stories more engaging and more authentic.
- Adding quotes from your sources adds emotions and personality to the story.
- You can use direct, partial, dialogue or paraphrase quotes in your story.

Usage of Quotes

- Don't bore readers with dull, obvious quotes.
- Don't rehash what a quote is saying.
- Avoid using a quote as the lead.
- Beware of monologues.
- It's best not to mimic someone's dialect.
- Beware of foul language.
- Keep the quote in context.

Summary

Before the interview:

1. Know the subject

- Seek specific information
- Research the subject
- List the questions

2. Know the person

- Know biographical information
- Know the person's expertise regarding subject matter

In Summary

3. Set up the interview

- Seek specific information
- Set the time at interviewee's convenience
- Length of time needed
- Possible return visits

4. Discuss arrangements

- Tape recorder?
- Photographer?

In Summary

During the interview:

- When you arrive control the seating arrangement
- Place recorder at optimum spot
- Warm up person briefly with small talk
- Set the ground rules
 - Everything on the record
 - Everything attributable

In Summary

- Use good interview techniques
 - Open-ended questions
 - Allow the person to think and to speak; remember to pause
 - Don't have a threatening voice or manner
 - Control the flow but be flexible

In Summary

- Take good notes
 - Be unobtrusive
 - Be thorough
- Use the tape recorder
 - Assume it's not working
 - Note digital counter at important parts



In Summary

Before you leave the interview:

- Ask if there's anything interviewee wants to say
- Check facts — spellings, dates, statistics, quotes
- Set time for rechecking facts, quotes
- Discuss when and where interview might appear

In Summary

- After the interview
 - Organize your notes immediately
 - Craft a proper lead
 - Write the coherent story
 - Determine if both sides of story are reflected
 - Make sure you have enough sources
 - Primary sources?
 - Secondary sources?
 - Check accuracy with interviewee

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