

How to Conduct an Interview: The Art of Interviewing

Talking points and procedure [numbers reference slides in accompanying PowerPoint file].

1. Introduce self. Ask room – Who has conducted a journalistic interview before? Briefly talk about your experience interviewing. Give quick overview of the session.
 - The steps in the interview process
 - Demonstration interview with guest scientist
 - Critique and Q&A afterwards
2. What's the purpose of your interview? From your research, determine the purpose for conducting an interview with this person or group.
Why? To better understand the science, gather more information or clarify what you already learned.
3. Why? For information – uncover something unique that is not readily available
4. Why? For Perspective and opinions – Able to capture the speaker's voice. Short quotes are okay.
5. Why? For Context – Where does this story fit into the bigger picture
6. Why? To get additional expert opinions or personal accounts
7. Why? Remain open to new ideas for the storyline. Collecting quotes
8. Examples of possible writing assignments
9. Possible topics you might include in the article
 - Green items are things you can find out through your own research
 - Peach boxes are the reason you really have to do the interview to get a good story. These boxes are also the likely topics that you will expect to get quotes from.
10. Use your framework to identify the list of interviewees
11. Set up the interview
 - Usually get good responses (So don't be shy!) People want to promote their research
 - By direct email or phone call
 - Through media contact at university
 - Keep it brief – 30 minutes max or people may be deterred by commitment
12. The orange text emphasizes items you want to be sure to include when you reach out: where will the article be published, what's the topic you want to interview the person about, why have you selected them in particular, let them know how much of their time you need, and consider suggesting a few possible times
13. Before you begin – Learn everything you can about the person and their work/interests
 - For news articles, read the paper multiple times (including supplementary), know background info as much as possible
 - For bios, etc. do your research (find person's CV, read previous interviews, research homepage, etc.)
 - Preparation helps you to be spontaneous and follow the story

14. The following slides will describe some suggested steps to follow while conducting the interview. Recommend that the participants find what works for them and develop their own system. Being comfortable with tech/routine helps make a smooth interview
 - Describing your goals for the interview.
15. Some suggestions for tools to record an interview.
 - Practice using the software before the interview.
 - It's never a bad idea to have a backup method
16. Use of the traditional pen and paper does not mean spending your time writing everything down. Can assist by writing down the time when a good quote was made or jot down a comment that could lead to a follow-up or new question.
 - If the interview is recorded, it's not 100% necessary to capture everything. Just take the notes necessary to ask future questions, and important quotesAsk the class for other suggestions or any personal experiences with tools on the current list.
17. Steps to end the interview, make additional connections to other resources and leave the door open for follow-up questions.
18. Jump in with prepared questions that are broad, open-ended, not too specific
 - Use your questions to guide the person during the interview
19. After breaking the ice with some broad questions, begin to dig into details. Be a spontaneous, active listener.
 - Don't be afraid to ask for a simpler explanation (even if you don't personally need it) if it will help get a good, personal quote
20. Before you end the interview, clarify anything the interviewee said that was confusing or incomplete.
21. Encourage interviewees to explain in their own words or speak of the topic on a personal level to gather their story.
22. Don't ask questions that lead to short answers or conduct a discussion that allows the person to simply agree with your statements.
23. Examples of bad questions that can be reshaped into good questions.
24. Some other conversation stoppers: not allowing time for their response and not being flexible
 - Sit silently longer than you think you should. Become comfortable with silence.
 - Remember to be a spontaneous, active listener. If the interviewee says something interesting be prepared to leave plan for more interesting story
25. The interview should be a conversation, with a purpose
26. Distill the information to keep the good, remove the bad.
 - This may not be your favorite thing to do, but it has to be done.
 - Also listen to yourself on the recording and use it to evaluate your interviewing skills. Can be a confidence builder, can give insight on how to improve.
27. Explain the difference between revising, rewording and correcting speech. You trim and straighten, but you don't make it up.
28. Keep the lines of communication open after the interview concludes, even as you write and publish the article.

29. Ask for questions for the workshop participants before observing the demonstrative interview with the guest scientist.
30. This slide is the lead into the Demonstrative Interview with the guest scientist: The description of the assignment
31. List of information that the interviewer needs to collect during the interview.
32. Two phases of the interview with the guest scientist
 - Scientific Research – interviewee will not use lay terms to describe her/his work, too much jargon
 - Outreach + Value – interviewee has difficulty opening up and giving more than the minimal details about her/his experiences
33. Group Discussion: What strategies could the interviewer use to improve the two interviews?



This project was supported by the National Science Foundation under Award No. 0940143. Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this program are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Foundation.

Published under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-ShareAlike license:
<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/us/>