



Interview Strategies and Tips

Preparing for the Interview

How to Prepare/ What to Bring

- ★ Release form for interviewee to sign
- ★ Back-up recording device (record every interview with two devices Eg. iphone with lavalier mic and Yeti)
- ★ Back-up batteries
- ★ Notepad and pen
- ★ Research route and travel time to location. If helpful, scout interview location beforehand. Record address, interviewee name; and scheduled time of interview on notepad.
- ★ Do your homework- research your interview subject beforehand and prepare informed, clear and concise interview questions. Design your questions so they are open-ended, avoiding yes or no questions. Instead of “Do you skip school?” modify to “Why do you think students skip school?”
- ★ Prepare and print out questions (leave space to jot down more questions and take notes during interview)
- ★ Lay out and test equipment; replace batteries; empty memory cards; charge phone or recording device; check and make sure you have the appropriate cords
- ★ Establish a rapport pre-interview with your subject. This could be a phone call where you could let them know what to expect; let them know you will send them the questions beforehand; if the interview will be at their home, ask them about where they would be most comfortable to do the interview and whether they have a quiet space. If filming, whether they have a prop that will help them tell the story; and whether they have b-roll they could gather. You will need to make time for shooting b-roll and room tone after the interview.

Etiquette

- ★ Be on time.
- ★ Stay alert.
- ★ Dress appropriately. Let the interviewee know not to wear clothing that will make noise during the recording like a starchy shirt or crinkly rain gear. If filming, no bright colors or shirts with patterns. Depending on location, suggest weather-appropriate clothing.
- ★ Let the interviewee know what you will need ahead of time: a quiet, smaller room (to minimize echo) where they feel comfortable; two chairs and a table for the microphone; etc. Let them know what to expect: you can choose to send the questions ahead of time; you can let them know the interview will be about an hour long; etc.
- ★ Be prepared to share how you will use this interview and how they can access the final piece.
- ★ Respect your interviewee’s time commitment; don’t go way over time.
- ★ Leave personal biases at the door.
- ★ Exchange contact information with the interview subject and let them know they can contact you anytime with post-interview questions or concerns. Follow up the interview with a thank you email or card.

Conducting a Good Interview

- ★ Have interviewee sign the release form.
- ★ Use your prepared interview questions but be flexible, allowing for a meaningful dialogue with your interview subject. (This requires that you listen attentively to the interviewee’s responses.)
- ★ Engage in active listening: nod your head in response to the questions and maintain eye contact with your interview subject.

- ★ As you set up and mic your interviewee, let them know that you will ease into the topic and that they don't have to answer everything perfectly. Let them know they can redo their response at any point and that you will edit out any errors.
- ★ Ask your interviewee to respond in language that is easy to understand and have them explain difficult concepts. You can use tactics such as, "If you had to explain this to a 5th grader..." "Can you give me an example of that?" "Why should I care?"
- ★ Wear headphones so you can monitor the recording. Keep an eye on the recording devices to make sure they are recording; check that the levels are staying in the target range; and make sure that any external noise is not interfering with sound quality.
- ★ Make sure your interview subject is as comfortable as possible (eg. comfortably seated; not too hot or cold; cords aren't in their way, etc.)
- ★ If filming, decide on eye trace: on-axis gaze (subject looks directly into camera like in political debates, call to action pieces, or if you have a story narrator); off-axis gaze (subject looks at interviewer who sits close to one side of the camera for conversational interviews).
- ★ Spend 10 seconds in silence to make sure there aren't any room noises that will affect the sound quality. (Ticking clocks, AC, fans, loud refrigerator, outside traffic noise, barking dog) If there are, you might need to turn some things off, or relocate to a back office or room.
- ★ If you are not planning to hear your questions in the final piece, ask the person to rephrase the question as part of their answer. Practice having them answer in a full sentence.
- ★ Avoid speaking or laughing over what the interviewee is saying. Nod and smile, limiting your verbal response.
- ★ When posing follow-up or clarifying questions, wait until the interviewee has completed their thought and is done talking. Use a "pregnant pause" to make sure they are really finished before you continue with more questions.
- ★ If background noise or technical glitches come up during the interview, do not hesitate to re-ask the question.
- ★ What kinds of sounds can you gather from your interview site that may help tell the story? Birds chirping; workplace sounds; weather (rain or wind?); transportation sounds; etc...

Interview Questions Tips

Phrase your questions clearly, concisely and in order to elicit full responses. Avoid posing questions that the person can answer a simple "yes" or "no" to: Here are some ideas:

- ★ Tell me about...
- ★ How do you feel about... Looking back how do you feel about....
- ★ Could you tell me what it was like when...
- ★ Could you describe the moment when...
- ★ Could you describe your first reaction to...
- ★ Include the five "W's" (Who, What, Where, When, Why) and How.
- ★ Picture a funnel- start with broader questions (establishing rapport and confidence with your subject) and funnel down to the more personal, emotional, demanding, or complex questions as the interview progresses.
- ★ End the interview with an open-ended question such as, "Is there anything else you want to add; anything we forgot to cover?"
- ★ At the end of the interview, thank the interviewee for their time, participation, and expertise. Offer to put anything you moved back in place for them. Exchange any contact information for future follow up.