

Interviewing Quick Tips

At its core, an interview is about letting a subject share their voice for a story.

- **Go in with a plan, but be open to going off-script:** Have a sense of what you want to get from the interview. Write down your questions beforehand. But don't forget to listen closely to what your interviewee says, and ask questions based on their answers.
- **Ask open-ended questions:** Open-ended questions cannot be answered with "yes" or "no." Examples are questions that ask who, what, when, where, why, and how. Instead of asking "Do you like chocolate?" ask "What is your favorite dessert and why?"
- **Listen closely and show it:** Give your interviewee your full attention. Respond to what they're saying. Use your body language (leaning forward, nodding, and making eye contact) to show them that you care about what they're saying.
- **Ask follow-up questions:** If your interviewee says something interesting, ask for more! Dig deeper into what you are curious about. Ask "Why?" and "How?" Or even, "Wow! Tell me more!"
- **Seek out emotion and stories:** The purpose of an interview is to collect new information. You've done your research, so you already have facts (data, numbers, statistics). Now you're looking for the stories and emotions that back up the numbers. We call this "showing, not telling." Use stories to help the listener understand why this topic is important. To get a story, ask questions like, "Take me back to the day when..." Or "What did it sound/smell/feel like when..." or "Tell me about a time when..." or "What was the first moment when you knew..."

More Tips for Great Interviews

- **Be prepared:** Show up to the interview with as much knowledge as possible. Do your research on the person you're interviewing and the interview topic beforehand.
- **Make your interviewee feel comfortable:** This may be the first time your subject is being interviewed. Let them know who you are, why you want to talk with them, and how the interview will be used (for example, posted online, broadcast on the radio, broadcast on a podcast, shared in a newsletter, or used in promotional materials).
- **Ask your subject to introduce themselves:** At the beginning of your interview, ask your subject for their name and title. Ask them to spell their full name for you.
- **Ask simple questions:** Ask one question at a time.
- **Follow your curiosity:** Ask questions you actually want to know the answers to.
- **Ask for specific details about specific moments:** What did it smell/sound/taste like? What was the exact moment when you knew? Walk me through that moment. What were you thinking in that moment? What was it like the day when...? Take me back to the day...
- **Leave room for silence:** Don't be afraid to pause and give your interviewee time to think after you ask a question. If you wait, they will jump in and fill the silence.
- **Listen more than you talk:** You are the interviewer, not the focus of the interview. The spotlight is on the other person.
- **Re-ask questions for clearer answers:** If your interviewee is giving long, complicated answers, you can re-ask your question and prompt them to give you a simpler quote. Examples: "In one sentence, can you tell me why this research is important?" Or, "Explain it to me like I'm a bored 12-year-old."
- **Stay away from leading questions:** A leading question prompts the interviewee to give the answer you want to hear. An example of a leading question is, "Don't you think the new project is terrible?"
- **Do not make assumptions about your interviewee.**
- **Stay open mentally and emotionally to what your subject is saying:** You'll only hear what you're open to hearing!
- **End your interview with these two questions:** Is there anything else you'd like to tell me? Who else should I be talking to about this?