

How to Interview

Name: _____ Date: _____

When interviewing an individual, you need to consider the following information. It will help you be less stressed, get the most information, and learn professional behaviors. Review these guidelines before you even ask your first question in the interview!

Establish an Interview

What Questions? When you go to arrange an interview with someone at your site, first figure out what information you still need to know. Do this by reviewing all of the information you have available to you and then figure out where the information holes are. For instance, if a brochure tells you that the organization is concerned with helping solve poverty, a good question to ask is, “how does the organization determine what poverty is?”

Who Knows? After you know what your questions are (be sure to write them out and review them with classmates or your teacher), then you need to determine who to interview, who would know the answers to your questions. Good people to interview are individuals with whom you are in constant contact because they know the most about your work and what you are trying to get out of your time at site. However, there may be others who would have the information you are looking for. It is always ok to ask your advisor and your mentor who would be the best person to ask.

When and Where? Once you have figured out whom to interview, you need to determine when and where that individual is available. Approach your interviewee with your name, your school, and your assignment. Politely ask if you could interview them for a few minutes when he or she has the time. Then politely ask him or her when there might be some time available for you. Make sure that you are available for that time as well. This may mean discussing the time with your advisor or mentor. Then confirm the time with the interviewee and tell him or her that you’re excited to spend some time with him or her later. Be sure to alert your mentor and advisor of your interview time and location so that they can know where to find you for any reason.

Before the interview, make sure you know

- exactly what you want to ask,
- how you want to ask it, and
- how you are going to record the information.

Before You Ask

Once you have asked someone to commit to an interview, you really need to value his or her time. Therefore limit your questions to no more than five for a twenty-minute interview, or three for a ten minute interview. Have your questions written down and rehearsed before you go into the interview.

Good questions always follow these six, basic beginnings: who, what, when, where, why, and how. Your questions should have one of these six words in them somewhere. Good questions are complete sentences and ask the interviewee something you do not already know from previous research.

Finally, be on time and prepared for your interview. You have asked someone to take time to meet with you so you must respect the commitment and honor the appointment. If you will be late or absent for any reason, you should always do your best to let your interviewee and your advisor know.

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Asking a Question

When you are in your interview, you must be respectful, polite, and prepared. You should begin the interview by reviewing your name, school, and purpose of the interview, once again. You should tell what is going to be done with the information shared with you (i.e. paper submitted to advisor, school newspaper, etc.). Finally, you should see if they have any questions or concerns before you begin.

Once you ask your first question, be sure to be listening to your interviewee but also taking any relevant notes. Do not get trapped trying to write down, word-for-word, everything that is said during the interview. If you think that this is going to be a problem for you, check with your interviewee, advisor, and mentor to see if audio taping the interview is ok with all. Relevant notes include key words, main points, or summations of their answers.

Be sure to give your interviewee plenty of eye contact as well. If you are writing the answers down, it can be frustrating to not see your eyes and know that you know what is being said. An interview will require your absolute attention and focus.

Getting the Information

Before you arrive to the interview, you should have a notepad and something to write with ready to go. You should include as a header, the name of your interviewee, the date, location, and time of the interview. You may also record the question in your notebook keeping space between each question for your notes on their response.

Follow-up

Once the interview is complete, thank your interviewee for his or her time and thoughts. Ask if there are any questions that he or she would like to ask before you go. If so, answer the questions to the best of your ability. Once you have addressed any final questions or concerns, conclude the interview with a handshake and eye contact, thanking him or her for speaking with you.

If, after you look over your notes, you have questions about one of the answers you received, you may need to call or email with follow-up questions. This is perfectly acceptable and understandable, but keep the questions limited. No more than two questions should be posed so pick the ones you are most concerned about.