



INTERVIEWS

Learn about Interviewing

Interviewing people about their life gives us insight into the world that we live in. People's recollection of what they did, how they felt, and why they did the things they did remind us that history is not a thing which happened on its own, but rather, that history is a series of personal experiences, created one at a time, by individuals, one decision at a time.

There have been hundreds of thousands of documentaries made that tell the stories of people and events. Many use the technique of interviews to give the audience insight and information about the subject that is being explored.

The people in your family, school and community are a great resource for discovering information on a variety of subjects ranging from historical events, the arts, geography, sports and much more. To make your interviewing experience the best that it can be, consider following these steps.

Establish who your subject is.

The first thing to do is to choose who your subject may be. You can look at people in the school, community, your family or others as possible subjects. Start off by researching possible subjects and writing down why you think a person would be great to interview.

Confirm your subject

If you are interested in interviewing someone, here are some suggestions on how to see if they would be interested in participating in an interview.

By Phone

1. Determine the subjects phone number (using phone books, the Web or their friends)
2. Call them up, but not too early in the morning or too late in the evening.
3. Introduce yourself by giving your name, what school you are from, and the nature of your project. Let them know that you are calling to see if they would be interested in helping out on this school project by being interviewed. Tell them why specifically it would be great to have them interviewed (based on your research) All of this can be written out in note form so that you can reference this while you are on the phone with the potential subject.
4. Ask them if they would consider helping out on this school project by being interviewed.
5. If they say "Yes", then great. You can tell them more about the project, listen to their responses, and then move on to determining an interview date and time.
6. If the say "No", thank them immediately for their time, and politely say goodbye. Send them a letter immediately, thanking them again for their time, and again describing the school project. Invite them to contact you if their plans change and they decide that they would like to be a part of the project.
7. If they say "Maybe", then listen to their questions and concerns and answer them clearly and honestly. People are often scared or nervous of trying something new, and many people,



especially seniors, may be less comfortable with video cameras and interviews. You can usually ease these fears by simply talking more about your project, why it is important, why it is important to you, and how much fun it could be. You can also tell them that they can have a copy of the interview to keep for their own family, if they would like.

In Person

1. Determine where the person works or lives.
2. Call on them, not too early or too late. Call with one of your group partners so you don't have to be nervous about asking alone. Do not take any video cameras or equipment on this first meeting.
3. Prepare a letter that explains who you are, what you are doing, and why you would like them to consider being interviewed. Bring the letter with you and be prepared to leave it with them. It should include information on how to get a hold of you.
8. Introduce yourself by giving your name, what school you are from, and the nature of your project. Let them know that you are calling to see if they would be interested in helping out on this school project by being interviewed. Tell them why specifically it would be great to have them interviewed (based on your research) All of this should be memorized so that when you talk to them, you don't have to refer to your notes.
9. Ask them if they would consider helping out on this school project by being interviewed.
10. If they say "Yes", then great. You can tell them more about the project, listen to their responses, and then move on to determining an interview date and time.
11. If they say "No", thank them immediately for their time, and politely say goodbye. Send them a letter immediately, thanking them again for their time, and again describing the school project. Invite them to contact you if their plans change and they decide that they would like to be a part of the project.
12. If they say "Maybe", then listen to their questions and concerns and answer them clearly and honestly. People are often scared or nervous of trying something new, and many people, especially seniors, may be less comfortable with video cameras and interviews. You can usually ease these fears by simply talking more about your project, why it is important, why it is important to you, and how much fun it could be. You can tell them that they can have a copy of the interview to keep for their own family, too, if they would like.

Permission

Make sure that your subject gives their permission to be interviewed and recorded on videotape. A simple www.thedirectorintheclassroom/library/permission.pdf should be filled out before filming begins. The permission slip demonstrates that your subject has given you permission to present their image and sound to others in your class, school, community and beyond.

Determine a good time and place for an interview

Ask your subject when it would be possible to interview them.

Is their one day that is better than another? Weekdays? Weekends?

Is there a time of day that is better than another? Morning? Afternoon? Evening?

Before asking, determine what time you or your group is available so that you will quickly be able to know when everyone can be there and make a decision as to the date and time. Also discuss where the interview will be held.

- Will it be held at the school? At the persons home? At their place of work? At your school? In a park? This is where you can be creative and explore ideas for the location.



Keep in mind a few things.

- Does the location have something to do with the person or the subject? For example an interview with a painter would be more interesting in their art studio than in a bare room because not only will the background inform us about the person but also the person may be inspired by the things around them.
- Will my subject feel at ease?
- Some people feel more at ease in their own home, and others are fine with being interviewed in a public space.
- Will my subject feel physically comfortable?
- If it is very cold or very hot outside, it may be physically uncomfortable for your subject, and they may not enjoy or be able to complete their interview.
- Will it be quiet enough for us to record their interview or is a location too close to traffic, loud machinery or other loud noises?
- Will there be adequate lighting? Can we find ways to make it lighter (opening windows, doors, window blinds) or do we have to bring in additional lights, and if so, is there available power to plug them in?

Preparing Questions

Before the day of the interview arrives, prepare yourself by listing on paper a series of questions. You may, and should, ask new questions that you had not prepared for, but it is essential to have at least some questions ready to ask.

First consider some questions that you might ask your subject at the beginning of the interview to get them used to being interviewed on camera. For example:

- What is their name?
- Where were they born?
- Where did they go to school?

Then consider some questions to ask that relate to what your project is about. What questions could you ask that will get them to tell you stories and also details about the subject that you are studying. List these questions down on paper, and remember to phrase the question so that it cannot be answered with only a Yes or a No. (Example: Did you like your first job? Could be answered yes or no, but “What did you like (or dislike) about your first job?” will be answered with more descriptive answers. These are called open-ended questions. Next time you listen to someone on the radio or television interviewing someone, notice that the questions are almost always open ended.

Even though you have prepared questions in advance, one of the exciting things about interviewing someone is that you discover new things. What you must do is listen carefully to everything that the person is saying, and if they are saying something that makes you want to know more, chances are that your audience also wants to learn more, so don't be afraid to ask a question that may come to your mind. (Example: Q: What was your first job? A: I worked as an apprentice in a shop. Q: What kind of a shop was it? A: It was a blacksmith shop? Q: What did an apprentice have to do in a blacksmith shop? A. Well, I used to...)

Sometimes people being interviewed will talk at length about something but it may have nothing to do with what your project is about. If your subject is talking about something that no longer relates to the subject of the interview, politely interrupt them by trying to take the story back to your subject, or by asking another one of your planned questions.

Preparation

It is a good idea to rehearse the asking of your question to another student, so that you can get used to speaking the questions. In fact, your test subject can answer real questions and you can practice some listening skills as you ask them more questions.



It is a good idea not to give the subject specific questions in advance of the actual shooting, so that they do not rehearse answers, and so that their responses will look and feel fresh and exciting (because they are!)

Planning

Decide exactly what equipment you need <link to equipment requirement>

Check that your equipment is in running order and that you have:

- Blank tapes
- Charged camera batteries
- Tripod
- Extension Cords
- Microphone (some microphones also require batteries)
- Headphones

And what ever else you have in your equipment list.

Determine who exactly in your crew is going to:

- Interview the subject
- Operate the camera
- Operate the microphone
- Take care of the lighting
- Direct the interview

Filming A Three Camera Interview With One Camera

Many interviews that you may see on television are filmed with three cameras. One camera records the subject or interviewee, a second records the interviewer, and the third records an image of both of them together in a wider shot and this wider shot usually reveals more about where the interview is taking place. Instead of filming with three cameras at once, you can create the same effect with a single camera using three setups. Here's how.

Setup A

Record the person being interviewed and record the entire interview with the camera on the subject only, not on the person asking the questions.

Setup B

Move the camera to a corner of the room or 10-15 feet away if at an outside location, and compose a shot where the image is of both the subject and the interviewer. It is not crucial to record their conversation as it has already been recorded. This shot might be used at the beginning or at the end of the video to show the audience where the interview took place and who was present at the interview. Have the interviewer repeat one of the questions and record a minute of the two of them talking. If possible try to include information in the background that tells as much as possible about the location being used.

Setup C

Allows the subject to get up or to leave the set and then turn the camera around and place it where the subject was, so that it is now aiming at the interviewer. Now record the interviewer asking the same questions as before, while the interviewer looks next to the lens of the camera, where the subject used to be. Check that the eye-line will match with the first setup. Example, if the subject is looking left to right on screen, then the interviewer must be looking right to left. <www.thedirectorinthe classroom/library/eyeline.pdf>



Production

- Arrive with your binder of questions. Make sure that you arrive at the time that you and your subject have agreed to.
- Bring along any other material that you wish to show them, for example, photographs that you would like them to talk about, or music that you can play for them that they may talk about, or clothing, tools, or other things that may be important to your project.
- Ask the subject for the correct spelling of their name, and how they would like it to appear on the screen. Make sure to write this down, or to have them spell it on camera, (or both).
- Determine where exactly you would like the interview to take place and specifically where the subject will be seated or standing. You may want to have one of your crew “stand in” for the subject, so that the subject does not have to wait for you to perfect the lighting and camera placement. Here’s a suggested plan for the production.
- Determine where the subject is going to be, taking into consideration the existing lighting and sound levels. Have the stand in take the place of where the subject is going to be. Determine where the best camera location is for the interview.
- Turn the camera on and look at the composition in the viewfinder or preferably on an external video monitor and move the camera around, trying different angles and distances. Work towards good composition. <www.thedirectorintheclassroom/library/composition.pdf>
- Determine if additional lighting is required and if so, add (or subtract) lighting and watch the results in the viewfinder and monitor. <www.thedirectorintheclassroom/library/lighting.pdf>
- Attach the microphone, put on the headset and test that the microphone is working. <www.thedirectorintheclassroom/library/sound.pdf>
- Record a minute of test footage with the stand in, and then play it back, to determine that everything is working, that the lighting is acceptable and that sound is being recorded.
- When you are ready to go, have the stand in exit and then call in the subject. Determine who on your crew will indicate to the subject where you would like them to be, and have that person show them where that is.
- Have the interviewer take a seat if the subject is seating, or standing if the subject is standing, right next to the camera, as close as possible to the lens. This will help the subject look just off-camera and will help the audience feel as if they are part of the conversation.
- If possible, have someone on your crew provide your subject with a glass of water, as sometimes people’s throats get dry when they are nervous and when they are talking.
- Begin talking to the subject just to get them comfortable. Don’t ask any of the real questions yet. It may be a conversation to thank them again for taking the time, or to comment on the house or location that they are in.
- While the subject and interviewer are talking the, the camera operator may have to adjust for the subjects height or the way that they sit or stand in order to get a better composition. Remember that a good rule for the camera’s height it that the lens be at the same height as the subject’s eyes.
- When the camera operator is ready, and the microphone is working, and everyone is ready to go, the interviewer should be notified and the interview can begin.

The Interview Begins

- The director will ask the camera operator to “roll” and when the camera operator has pressed the record button and is satisfied that it is recording, they might let the crew know that they are ready by saying “Camera.” The person monitoring the audio may also let the crew know that they are ready by saying “Sound.”



- The director can then let the interviewer know that everything is set by saying “Ok.” “Action” is more commonly said to begin a dramatic recording.
- Start the interview with your warm-up questions so that the subject can get used to talking and can become less nervous.
- Begin asking the planned questions, keeping in mind that they are starting points for the interview and not the only questions that can be asked.
- After you ask a question, avoid looking down to your notes to find the next question. Instead, look into your subject’s eyes, and listen to every word that they are saying. Give them someone to talk to and to listen to, your goal is to create a conversation with them, not to record their monologue. People tell better stories when they see that someone is interested, and when you look into someone’s eyes, it tells them that you are indeed interested. If they have finished talking and you have no spontaneous questions to ask them, then check your notes for the next question, and don’t worry if it takes a minute for you to find your place and prepare for the next question.
- The other great thing about looking at someone’s eyes while they talk to you is that you create a connection between interviewer and interviewee. This connection will help you pay attention to what is being said, and will inspire you to ask more questions based on what you are learning at that moment.
- Don’t worry about asking questions that you have not planned for, if they don’t work out, you don’t have to use them, just like you don’t have to use every answer that the subject gives. Through the glorious tool of editing, you will have a chance later to refine the best of the answers and the best of the questions to give the audience the best information on your subject.
- Continue the interview by proceeding through the questions that you have planned.
- When the interview is at an end, thank your guest. After a few moments the director will say “cut” and the video camera can be turned off, and the interview is over.
- If you are directing the interview, be aware of what the subject is doing during the interview. If they were looking through a photo album for example, it would be a great idea to film a close up shot of their hands turning the pages, or of their eyes looking at the album, or of the pages of the album themselves, as they are being turned. These are called “Cutaways” and will come in handy during the editing. They are descriptive shots that give the audience more information about what was happening during the interview and the best cutaways reveal more information about the subject themselves.
- Finally, make sure to thank your guest before they leave, or if you are at their house, before you leave!

Follow Up

- Write a thank-you letter to your subject and enclose any photos or videos that you wish to give them in appreciation of their time.

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