

ORAL STORYTELLING: INTERVIEWS

An interview is an opportunity to connect with someone else and hear their stories. Bring your curiosity to the conversation so you can be an investigative storyteller. Read the tips below for an engaging and meaningful interview.

I - PLAN AND PREPARE

Know who you are interviewing and why. What have they achieved? Why are they a good person to interview for this topic? This will keep you focused and allow your interviewee to feel more at ease.

Research

- Research the main topic(s) beforehand (historical figure or event, human rights issue, etc.). Locate information from a variety of sources.
- Gather background information on your interviewee. Identify why they are a good person to interview for the topic.

Write questions that will...

- Focus on the main topic(s) that you want to address in your interview. Draw on your research to develop questions.
- Be (mostly) open- ended to invite longer, more thoughtful answers and bring out anecdotes and opinions ("Tell me about...", "How did you feel when...."). Avoid yes/no questions.
- Encourage vivid and sensory descriptions by asking your interviewee to recall specific details ("How did this city/place/event look, sound like, etc.," "Describe your kitchen when you were growing up (smells, sounds, visuals).")
- Prompt interviewee to reflect on how the topic impacted their lives and taught them life lessons about people and the world.
- Be short, clear, and feel comfortable coming out of your mouth. Be sure to practice your questions aloud.

Prepare for the conversation:

- Gather materials such as a pencil, and notepad. Consider using a recording device so you can be more present during the interview.
- Have your questions printed so that you can read them easily.
- Practice introducing yourself and reading questions out loud to yourself or a partner so you are comfortable speaking them.
- Consider sending your questions to the interviewee ahead of time so they are ready.

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ORAL STORYTELLING: INTERVIEWS *(continued)*

II - WARM -UP AND CONNECT

Take a few minutes to make your interviewee feel comfortable and get the interview off to a smooth start.

- Greet your interviewee warmly and introduce yourself. Thank them for agreeing to the interview.
- Ask some basic and friendly warm- up questions (“Where were you born? “How long have you lived here?, etc.)
- Tell your interviewee why you have chosen to interview them; restate the main purpose of the interview.
- Relax and let your interviewee know how curious you are to hear their responses and learn from them.

III - ASK QUESTIONS AND LISTEN

Ask some of your planned questions, but be flexible and attentive, and guide the storyteller toward what is important to them.

- Be prepared for your understanding of the topic to change during the interview. Your questions are a guide, but you can go off script if the interview leads to another topic. Some of the most interesting interviews happen this way.
- Pause to allow your interviewee extra time to think. Allowing for a few seconds of silence will likely improve their responses.
- Be a reflective listener and listen for clues to experiences that could lead to longer stories. Ask follow up questions to dig deeper (“What happened next?” “Tell me more about...,” “Give me an example of...,” “How did that make you feel?” “How did you react when that happened?”)
- Ask summarizing questions (Is there anything else I should have asked you?”, “What advice would you give someone about...?”, “How has your perspective about _____ changed?”, “What lessons did that place/person teach you?”)

IV - REFLECT AND SUMMARIZE

Reflect on the interview and summarize key information.

- Reflect: What went well? What challenges, if any, did you have?
- Listen to the interview recording: revise your notes, summarize important details and highlight key words and quotes.
- Check back with your interviewee if you have any additional questions.
- Send a thank you note or email to the interviewee.