

Interview

The word interview comes from Latin and middle French words meaning to “see between’ or “see each other”. Generally, an interview means a private meeting between people when questions are asked and answered. The person who answers the questions of an interview is called the interviewee. The person who asks the questions of our interview is called an interviewer. It suggests a meeting between two persons for the purpose of getting a view of each other or for knowing each other. When we normally think of an interview, we think a setting in which an employer tries to size up an applicant for a job.

An interview definition can be crafted as a gentle conversation between two people or more where questions are asked to a person to get the required responses or answers.

According to Gary Dessler, “An interview is a procedure designed to obtain information from a person’s oral response to oral inquiries.”

According to Thill and Bovee, “An interview is any planned conversation with a specific purpose involving two or more people”.

According to Dr. S. M. Amunuzzaman, “Interview is a very systematic method by which a person enters deeply into the life of even a stranger and can bring out needed information and data for the research purpose.”

The **purpose** is to gather information to explain an idea, event or situation in the news.

Conducting interviews for news stories is an important skill for any journalist. A “source” – anyone a journalist interviews - can provide the following elements that are vital to any news story, including basic factual information, perspective, and context on the topic being discussed and direct quotes.

There are, obviously, several types of interviews and each type calls for a special technique. Even the casual interview needs some pre-knowledge of the kind of information sought.

1. Casual Interview
2. The personality interview
3. The news interview
4. The telephone interview

For effective interviews, reporters prepare carefully, and they ask questions that induce the source to talk freely. Questions are directed at obtaining information on a theme that the reporter has in mind before beginning the interview. If a more important theme emerges, the reporter develops it. The reporter notes what is said, how it is said and what is not said. Sources are encouraged by the reporter's gestures and facial expressions to keep talking.

Four Principles

1. Prepare carefully, familiarizing yourself with as much background as possible

2. Establish a relationship with the source conducive to obtaining information.
3. Ask questions that are relevant to the source and that induce the source to talk.
4. Listen and watch attentively.

Preparation

There's a saying in newsrooms that good interviews follow the two "P's" persistence and preparation. Persistence is necessary to persuade people to be interviewed, and it is essential in following a line of questioning that the subject may find objectionable.

The Interviewer's Ground Rules

Both parties in an interview have certain assumptions and expectations. Generally, the reporter expects the interviewee to tell the truth and to stand behind what he or she has told the interviewer. The interviewee presumes the reporter will write the story fairly and accurately. Both agree, without saying so, that the questions and answers mean what they appear to mean—that is, that there are no hidden meanings.

Having said this, we must admit to the exceptions. Sources may conceal, evade, distort and lie when they believe it is to their advantage. The reporter must be alert to the signs of a departure from truth.

The rules that govern the reporter's behavior in the interview can be detailed with some certainty. Reporters, too, conceal, mislead and, at times, lie. Few reporters justify these practices. Most agree the reporter should:

1. Identify himself or herself at the outset of the interview.
2. State the purpose of the interview.
3. Make clear to those unaccustomed to being interviewed that the material will be used.
4. Tell the source how much time the interview will take.
5. Keep the interview as short as possible.
6. Ask specific questions that the source is competent to answer.
7. Give the source ample time to reply.
8. Ask the source to clarify complex or vague answers.
9. Read back answers if requested or when in doubt about the phrasing of crucial material.
10. Insist on answers if the public has a right to know them.
11. Avoid lecturing the source, arguing or debating.
12. Abide by requests for non-attribution, background only or off-the-record should the source make this a condition of the interview or of a statement.

Reporters who habitually violate these rules risk losing their sources. Few sources will talk to an incompetent or an exploitative reporter. When the source realizes that he or she is being used to enhance the reporter's career or to further the reporter's personal ideas or philosophy, the source will close up. Sources also risk trouble when they exploit the press. Reporters understand that their sources

will float occasional trial balloons and give incomplete, even misleading, information. But constant and flagrant misuse of the press leads to retaliation by journalists.

Ingredients

- The person's background (birth, upbringing, education, occupation).
- Anecdotes and incidents involving the subject.
- Quotes by the individual relevant to his or her newsworthiness.
- The reporter's observations.
- Comments of those who know the interviewee.
- A news peg, whenever possible.

Structure

Introduction-Body Text-Conclusion

Conducting interviews for news stories is an important skill for any journalist. A “source” — anyone a journalist interviews — can provide elements that are vital to any news story:

- Basic factual information
- Perspective and context on the topic being discussed
- Direct quotes
- Ideas on how to approach the story
- Names of other people to interview

Preparing for the Interview

Research

Do as much research as possible. If you’re going to interview, say, a cardiologist about heart attacks, read up and make sure you understand terms such as “cardiac arrest.” A well-prepared reporter inspires confidence in the source.

Developing Questions

Once you’ve thoroughly researched your topic, prepare a list of questions to ask. That will help you remember all the points you want to cover.

Keys to a Successful Interview

Establish a Rapport: When starting out, don’t abruptly launch into your questions. Chitchat a little first. Compliment your source on her office, or comment on the weather. This puts your source at ease.

Keep It Natural

An interview can be uncomfortable, so keep things natural. Instead of mechanically reading out your list of questions, weave your queries naturally into the flow of the conversation. Also, maintain eye contact as much as possible. Nothing is more unnerving to a source than a reporter who never looks up from his notebook.

Be Open

Don't be so focused on getting through your list of questions that you miss something interesting. For instance, if you're interviewing the cardiologist and she mentions a new heart-health study that's coming out, ask about it. This may take your interview in an unexpected — but newsworthy - direction.

Maintain Control

Be open, but don't waste your time. If your source starts to ramble on about things that are of no use to you, politely — but firmly — steer the conversation back to the topic at hand.

Wrapping Up

At the end of the interview, ask your source if there's anything important that you hadn't asked about. Double-check the meanings of any terms they used that you're unsure about. And always ask if there are other people they recommend that you speak with.

Notes about Note-Taking

Beginning reporters often freak out when they realize they can't possibly write down everything the source is saying, word-for-word. Don't sweat it. Experienced reporters learn to take down just the stuff they know they'll use, and ignore the rest. This takes practice, but the more interviews you do, the easier it gets.

Recording an interview is fine in certain circumstances, but always get permission from your source to do so.

The rules regarding taping a source can be tricky. According to Poynter.org, recording phone conversations is legal in all 50 states. Federal law allows you to record a phone conversation with the consent of only one person involved in the conversation — meaning that only the reporter is required to know that the conversation is being taped.

However, at least 12 states require varying degrees of consent from those being recorded in phone interviews, so it's best to check the laws in your own state. Also, your newspaper or website may have its own rules about taping.

Transcribing interviews involves listening to the taped interview and typing out virtually everything that's said. This is fine if you're doing an article with an extended deadline, such as a feature story. But it's too time-consuming for breaking news. So if you're on a tight deadline, stick to note-taking.

Always take written notes, even if you're using a recorder. Every reporter has a story about the time they thought they were recording an interview, only to get back to the newsroom to discover that the machine's batteries were dead.

Ends