

Conducting Interviews

The purpose of an interview is simple. In order to get information, you talk with someone who has significant experience or someone who is an expert on your topic. Use the guidelines below whenever you conduct an interview.

1. Prepare for the interview by doing your homework about the topic and your interviewee.

- Arrange the interview in a thoughtful way. Explain to the interviewee your purpose, the process, and the topics to be covered.
- Think about the specific ideas you want to cover in the interview and write questions for each. The 5 W's and H (*Who? What? Where? When? Why? and How?*) are important for good coverage.
- Organize your questions in a logical order so that the interview moves smoothly from one subject to the next.
- Write the questions on the left side of a page. Leave room for quotations, information, and impressions on the right side.

2. During the interview, try to relax so that your conversation seems natural and sincere.

- Provide some background information about yourself, your project, and your plans for using the interview information.
- Use recording equipment only with the interviewee's permission.
- Jot down key facts, quotations, and impressions.
- Listen actively. Show that you're listening through your body language—eye contact, nods, smiles. Pay attention not only to what the person says but also to how he or she says it.
- Be flexible. If the person looks puzzled by a question, rephrase it. If the discussion gets off track, redirect it. Based on the interviewee's responses, ask follow-up questions. (Don't limit yourself to your planned questions only.)

3. After the interview, do the following:

- As soon as possible, review your notes. Fill in responses you remember but couldn't record at the time.
- Thank the interviewee with a note, e-mail, or a phone call.
- If necessary, ask the interviewee to check that your information and quotations are accurate.
- Offer to send the interviewee a copy of your writing.