

I-Search Paper: Preparing for Your Interviews

Read and take notes on the following material; you will have a reading quiz.

Additional Notes that are NOT included in the reading:

- Know how to pronounce your interviewee's name.
- Send a thank you letter within the week after conducting your interview.
- Build a rapport with the interviewee so the questions you pose are conversational. Do NOT start drilling them with questions without first introducing yourself and the purpose of the interview.

SETTING UP THE INTERVIEW

Once you have a specific purpose for the interview and have decided whom you need to speak with, arrange a meeting. It is unwise to arrive unannounced at the office of a businessperson, public official, educator, or other professional and expect an on-the-spot interview. Even veteran journalist Mike Wallace has been refused under such circumstances! Instead, several days in advance, telephone the person you hope to interview, explain briefly who you are and why you are calling, and ask for an appointment. Most people are flattered to have their authority and knowledge recognized and willingly grant interviews to serious students if schedules permit.

If you are considering recording the interview on audio- or videotape, ask for the interviewee's okay during this initial contact. If the person does not grant permission, you will need to be prepared to gather your information without electronic assistance.

PLANNING THE INTERVIEW

Now that you know what you need to find out, whom you will see, and when the meeting will take place, your next step is to prepare for the interview itself. Do not try to "wing it" and let the interviewee ramble at will. To ensure the results you want, you need to plan your questions.

GATHER BACKGROUND INFORMATION Experienced interviewers are successful largely because they prepare so thoroughly for their interviews. Likewise, before you interview someone, find out as much as you can about both your subject and the person you are interviewing. Prepare questions that take full advantage of the interviewee's specific knowledge of your subject. You can do this only if *you* already know

a good deal about your subject. Build your line of questioning on facts, statements the interviewee has made, or positions he or she has taken publicly.

PLAN SPECIFIC QUESTIONS In addition to learning something about your subject and the person you are going to interview, it is helpful to think about how you should combine the two basic types of interview questions: closed-ended and open-ended.

As we discussed in Chapter 5, closed-ended questions call for a Yes or No answer or some brief statement of fact. "How many years have you served in the job?" and "Do you think that next month's tax referendum will pass?" are examples of closed-ended questions.

If you ask only closed-ended questions, however, you will limit and possibly frustrate your interviewee. You may also frustrate yourself. Open-ended questions allow the interviewee to express a personal point of view more fully. They interviewee may also give you more of the kind of information you probably want: expert testimony and personal experience. "Why do you think the asbestos should not be removed?" and "What, in your opinion, are the most serious potential consequences if it is removed?" are examples of open-ended questions. Open-ended questions often follow closed-ended questions. If the person you are interviewing answers a closed-ended question with a simple Yes or No, you may wish to follow up by asking "Why?"

PLAN A SEQUENCE OF QUESTIONS Once you have designed your questions to yield the information you want, you need to consider the order in which to ask them. You may want to organize questions according to subject categories, with three or four questions on one topic followed by three or four on another. You can arrange them according to complexity of information, with the easiest questions first, in part to ensure that you understand the subject. Or, you may want to order them by the sensitivity of the content, building some rapport with your interviewee and ensuring that you get at least some information, should he or she decline to answer the more sensitive or difficult questions.

PLAN A RECORDING STRATEGY Audio and video recorders can free you from having to take copious notes. You can concentrate instead on processing and analyzing the ideas and information being presented. Another advantage of recording the interview is that your record of the interview is complete. You will not have to decipher hastily scribbled notes a day or two after the interview.

The main disadvantage of using an electronic recorder is that it makes some people more self-conscious and nervous than if you were scribbling notes. You want the person being interviewed to concentrate on your questions, not on his or her own vocal inflection. Ask in advance whether the person you are interviewing will allow you to tape the session. Even if he or she gives permission, be prepared to turn off the device and switch to manual note-taking if you sense at any time that the interviewee is distracted by the recorder.

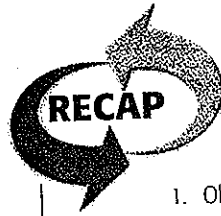
Before taping an interview, there are a number of questions that you should ask yourself. What kind of recorder should you use? Would a simple tape recorder with a built-in mike be less intimidating than a video camera on a tripod? Although the person you are interviewing will be aware that you are taping the interview, would he or she be more comfortable if the machine were out of sight? Ask the interviewee. You



If both parties are comfortable with it, the use of a tape recorder can free the interviewer and the interviewee from the need to concentrate on careful note-taking.

[Photo: © Bonnie Kamin/PhotoEdit]

might also want to ask some casual questions before turning on the recorder so that both of you can ease into the actual interview.



How to Plan an Interview

1. Obtain background information about the person you wish to interview.
2. Design the questions you will ask.
3. Plan a question sequence—what you will ask first, second, and so on.
4. Determine how you will record the responses of the person you interview: Will you use a tape recorder or video camera, or will you take notes?

CONDUCTING THE INTERVIEW

ON YOUR MARK . . . Dress appropriately for the interview. For most interviews, conservative, businesslike clothes show that you are serious about the interview and that you respect the norms of your interviewee's world.

Take paper and pen or pencil for note-taking. Even if you are planning to use a tape recorder, you may want to turn it off at some point during the interview, so you'll need an alternative. Or, Murphy's Law may snarl your tape or break your recorder. Ensure that the interview can continue, in spite of any mishaps.

GET SET . . . Arrive for the interview a few minutes ahead of the scheduled hour. Be prepared, however, to wait patiently, if necessary. Although the interview may be a high priority for you, the person you will interview has granted it as a courtesy and may need to complete something before speaking with you.

Once you are settled with the person you will interview, remind him or her of your purpose. If you are familiar with and admire the work the interviewee has done or published, don't hesitate to say so. Sincere flattery can help set a positive tone for the exchange. If you have decided to use a recorder, set it up. You may keep it out of sight once the interviewee has seen it, but never try to hide a recorder at the outset—such a ploy is unethical. If you are going to take written notes, get out your paper and pen. Now you are ready to begin asking your prepared questions.

GO! As you conduct the interview, use the questions you have prepared as a guide but not a rigid schedule. If the person you are interviewing mentions an interesting angle you haven't thought of, don't be afraid to pursue the point. Listen carefully to the person's answers, and ask for clarification of any ideas you don't understand.

Do not prolong the interview beyond the time limits of your appointment. The person you are interviewing is probably very busy and has been courteous enough to fit you into a tight schedule. Ending the interview on time is simply returning the courtesy. Thank your interviewee for his or her contribution, and leave.

FOLLOWING UP THE INTERVIEW

As soon as possible after the interview, read through your notes carefully and rewrite any portion that may be illegible. If you recorded the interview, label the tape with the date and the interviewee's name. You will soon want to transfer any significant facts, opinions, or anecdotes from either notes or tape to index cards or to a word-processing file. You will find a format for transcribing notes later in this chapter.

Possible Questions for your I-Search Interviews

****The possibilities of questions are endless. All of these questions are generic.****

Worker in your future field (Experienced)

- ✓ What are some advantages/disadvantages of this job?
- ✓ Describe your average day at work.
- ✓ What made you choose this line of work?
- ✓ Do you like your job? Why or why not? What could make it better?
- ✓ What advice would you give someone entering the field?
- ✓ How does your job affect your personal life?
- ✓ Is there a chance from advancement in this career?

Worker in your future field (Inexperienced)

- ✓ What was the transition like from college to the work force?
- ✓ Are you happy with the career you have chosen? Why or why not?
- ✓ Describe what the job search process was like for you after college.
- ✓ Did you feel that your education and training prepared you for this type of work?
- ✓ What do you like/dislike about this job?
- ✓ Do you feel like you have found your career? Or, will this job be a stepping-stone for your future?

Student at the college you wish to attend

- ✓ What do you like/dislike about the school?
- ✓ What extracurricular activities would you recommend getting involved with?
- ✓ How have you adjusted to college life?
- ✓ Do you feel challenged at this school?
- ✓ Describe the campus life/dorm life.
- ✓ What advice would you give to incoming freshmen?

Student currently enrolled in your major

- ✓ How helpful has your academic advisor been in informing you of which classes you need to take to graduate on time?
- ✓ Describe the relationship between professors and students in this program.
- ✓ Is the course work harder or easier than you expected? Explain.
- ✓ Can you make any recommendations which courses I should take and when?
- ✓ Can you recommend any professor that you thought was extremely helpful?
- ✓ How have you balanced school work with a social life?

A professor who teaches in your future program

- ✓ Describe what you expect from your students.
- ✓ How can students best prepare themselves for your program?
- ✓ Would you recommend students to study abroad or to get an internship? Why?
- ✓ Describe the work load for a student in this program.
- ✓ Describe your relationship with students in the program.
- ✓ Which courses would you recommend students to take early in their studies?
- ✓ What kind of jobs are available to people with this major?

A person working in an Internship or Study Abroad Office

- ✓ I am in the _____ program. Would you recommend either one of these experiences for me?
- ✓ How many credits do I need before accepting an internship/studying abroad?
- ✓ How many credits will I earn?
- ✓ What GPA do I need to maintain in order to study aboard or earn an internship?
- ✓ Which countries would you recommend I research to possibly study there? Why?
- ✓ Which companies would you recommend I research to possibly work as an intern there? Why?
- ✓ How do either one of these experiences help me in my future?

How to submit your assignment:
“Have Typed Interview Questions, Setup Interview Dates”

Your Name
Ms. Rygielski
Public Speaking/X Channel
Date

I-Search Interview Questions

Name of Interviewee: John Smith

Company and Position: Norwich Free Academy; English Teacher

Interview Date: January 1, 2010

Interview Contact Information:

<i>Address</i>	<i>Phone</i>	<i>Email</i>
305 Broadway Norwich, CT 06360	860-887-2505	smithj@norwichfreeacademy.com

Purpose of Interview: To learn about teaching from an experienced teacher. I want to focus on the daily schedule/responsibilities a teacher has, and also the perquisites and drawbacks of the job.

Interview Questions:

1. Describe your average day at work.
2. How does your job affect your personal life?
3. What made you choose this line of work?
4. If you were to start your career again, what would you do differently?
5. What responsibilities do you have as a teacher?
6. What are some advantages/disadvantages of this job?
7. What is the hardest thing about being a teacher?
8. What is the most rewarding aspect of this job?
9. What opportunities for advancement are in the field of education?
10. What advice would you give someone entering the field?

Reminders:

- You need a minimum of ten questions.
- LISTEN when your interviewee is answering your questions; do not ask a question they have already answered.
- If your interviewee is giving you short responses, ASK MORE QUESTIONS!