

Interviewing

Interviewing is one of the most important steps in the newsgathering process. It's the basic tool for obtaining information in practically all forms of news and feature stories.

Whether you interview over the telephone or face to face, preparation is the key to planned interviews. Research the subject and the source of information by reviewing his or her bio before the interview.

Questions

- Write several questions in advance. This is the key to a successful interview.
- Design the questions so you get the information you need to write the story.
- Prepare more questions than you think you'll need.
- Use your questions to keep the interview on the story's focus.

Tape Recorders

The key to effective interviewing is the ability to take notes with a tape recorder and pad and pen. Always ask the interviewee for permission to use a tape recorder. There are limitations to both.

Advantages

- Records everything.
- Enables the reporter to capture the rhythm of colorful speakers.
- Useful for rapid speakers.
- Enables the reporter to relax and concentrate on what is being said.
- Allows for self criticism so reporter might improve question-asking techniques.

Disadvantages

- Records everything -- background sounds, telephone rings, etc.
- Tapes must be transcribed.
- Mechanical failures.
- Intimidates subject.

****Good notetaking offsets the disadvantages of using a tape recorder when used in conjunction with the recorder.**

Effective Note taking

- Learn to abbreviate. Develop a personal shorthand method using abbreviations for common words.
- Transcribe your notes immediately following the interview.
- Learn to remember complete anecdotes and vivid phrases.
- Learn to keep writing, even if the source gets on something that doesn't interest you.
- Learn to get the high points -- facts, dates, correct names, figures, etc.
- Learn to remember what's said after the formal interview. Sometimes your subject will give you the best quotes after the interview.

Interviewing Tips

- Put subject at ease.
- Ask clear, brief questions.
- Avoid yes/no questions. Ask open-ended questions.
- Avoid leading questions.
- Ask specific questions to get specific answers.
- Don't be afraid to get away from your prepared questions.
- Don't ask dirty or embarrassing questions.
- Don't insult your source.
- Don't be afraid to stick to basic questions.