Conducting an Interview



General:

* Make arrangements
* Prepare
* Interview (organization, professionalism, courtesy)
* Reconcile and reconstruct

**Arrangements**

* Regardless of the type of interview (face-to-face, phone, or email) call your interviewee in advance to make an appointment.
* Introduce yourself, not just your name but your school and grade.
* Briefly explain what you are doing and why you want to talk to them.

**Preparations**

* Do some research in advance on your topic and your interviewee; you can check the library, public records, Internet, or people that you know who can provide background information.
* Prepare your questions in advance; write them down. However, it is important to be flexible enough to ask questions that arise in the course of the interview.
* Bring several sharpened pencils and a notebook or pad to take notes in, even if you bring a tape recorder.
* If you do bring a tape recorder, ask permission to use it from your interviewee.

**The Interview**

* Arrive on time, introduce yourself, and thank them for meeting with you.
* Start with a bit of casual conversation to put you both at ease, unless you have a very limited time.
* Questions should be short, to the point, and specific.
* Give your respondent time to answer; be a good listener.
* Ask for clarification if you are unclear about any points.
* Stick very strictly to your time limit if you have one.
* Invite the person to call you if she/he thinks of anything pertinent after the interview; leave contact information.
* Thank them for their time again when you leave.

**Reconstruction**

* As soon as it is feasible after the interview, review your handwritten notes.
* Make certain that you know what all your abbreviations mean, and that everything is legible.
* Star or highlight particularly important information or quotations.
* If you find an answer that doesn’t make sense, you might need to add the question to your notes.
* In short, fill any gaps that there may be in your notes before you set them aside.

Phone interviews and email interviews are a little different, but follow the same general guidelines of organization, professionalism, and courtesy. Do not forget the necessity to reconcile your notes as soon as possible after the interview.

**Phone Interviews**

* Do your homework regarding background information.
* Have your questions prepared and written down.
* Make sure that you are ready with paper, pencils, etc.
* Call promptly at the agreed-upon time.
* Identify yourself; thank the interviewee for their time.
* Ask permission to put your respondent on speaker or to use a recording device.
* Ask about the best time for a follow-up call if something needs clarification.
* Thank them for their time; leave contact information.

**Email Interviews**

* Again, basic guidelines for arrangements apply.
* The biggest difference here is that you will need to give yourself plenty of lead-time. Do not expect an immediate response.
* Plan for a turnaround time of at least a week; if they get back to you sooner, great!
* Be politely certain that she/he is aware of your time constraints (When are your resource notes due?)
* Prepare your questions, and then email them to your respondent.
* Be prepared to send a gentle reminder if they don’t get back to you within the agreed-upon time frame.
* If you need clarification about anything, be sure that **your** response time is very prompt.
* Thank them for taking the time to respond every time that they do.