

Student Organizer 5 Tips for Interviewing

Preparation

- Try to find out something about the person ahead of time. This will help you think of questions to ask.

Examples:

- If you're interviewing a newspaper reporter, read some articles he/she wrote.
- If you're interviewing your grandmother, ask your mom or dad to tell you something about her.
- If you plan to write up the interview as an assignment, be sure the person understands that others will read it and agrees to that.
- If you want to record the interview, ask the person for permission.
- Write out at least five questions you would like to ask. Use the Guidelines for Questions, below.

Guidelines for Questions

- **Ask open-ended questions.**

Your questions should be worded in a way that opens up the speaker and encourages him or her to talk. Open-ended questions will usually get more interesting responses than "leading questions," which show the speaker what you think the answer should be.

Examples:

- (leading question) "Weren't you scared when you landed in New York?"
- (open-ended question) "What were your feelings when you first landed in New York?"

- **Try to avoid questions with yes-or-no answers.**

If you do ask a yes-or-no question, follow with an open-ended question.

Example:

- (yes-or-no question) "Was it fun to spend your summers at the farm?"
- (open-ended question): "What did you especially enjoy about it?"

During the interview

- Allow "think time" for the person to respond to your questions. Don't be afraid of silence.
- Use active listening skills. Show that you're paying attention. Look at the speaker, and use signals like "mm-hmm" to show you are following.
- Don't interrupt.
- Check to make sure you understand. Ask questions to clarify what the speaker said. Sum up what you think you heard.
- As you take notes, write quickly, but legibly, using as much shorthand as you can, such as + for and, w/ for with, etc.

After the interview

- Thank the person you interviewed.
- As soon as you are alone, go over your notes. Write down anything you missed or didn't want to write at the time, like "looked sad when speaking of the war."
- No later than the next day, write a thank you note and mail it.
- If you taped the interview within 2-3 days, listen to/watch your audio or video recordings of the interview.

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