

## STUDENT HANDOUT: 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 first landed in Vietnam?"
- (open-ended question) "What were your feelings when you first landed in Vietnam?"
- Try to avoid questions with yes-or-no answers. If you do ask a yes-or-no question, follow up 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.
- Don't expect the interview to go according to plan. The person may start talking about something you didn't expect. If that happens, you have to decide if this new direction is worth following. If it is, you may need to throw out your prepared questions and think up different ones. If it's not worth pursuing, you will need to tactfully guide the person back to the main topic.
- 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.
- Within 2-3 days, listen to/watch your audio or video recordings of the interview.

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