

Interview Tips and Tricks

How do you start to develop interview questions? When you're preparing an interview without knowing much about someone's background, you can begin with some general questions that anyone could answer. Ask about experiences, relationships, food, life-cycle events, local heroes & heroines, lessons learned, etc. In some situations, if you want someone to recall experiences, you can frame your questions in terms of:

- The Most/The Least
- Favorite/Least Favorite
- Best/Worst
- The First/Last/Second Time
- The Funniest/The Most Serious

If you want someone to describe an event that happened, try the "5 Ws" that news reporters use: who, what, when, where, why. If someone accomplished a difficult feat, maybe you'll also want to ask how she or he did it, how long did it take, and how did it feel when it was over. Try to encourage descriptions from your interviewees that use senses other than sight. "It felt like the heat wave would melt my skin at any moment!" Use a tape recorder or pen and paper if you want to remember exact phrases. **SAMPLE QUESTIONS**

BASED ON AN EVENT THAT HAPPENED:

- Briefly describe WHAT happened?
- WHO was involved?
- WHERE did it happen? Describe the place.
- WHEN did it happen? Did the time of day or night affect what happened?
- WHY did it happen? Did the event create a problem or solve a problem?

- What other effects did the event have and for whom?
- HOW did it happen?
- Describe the conditions that allowed an event to happen.
You can also describe the action of how something happened step by step.

The Interview Process Pre-interview A good place to start the research is with the person you want to interview.

Sometimes a pre-interview is a good idea, posing some preliminary questions to get a better sense of the person's work and life. This can be done in person, by e-mail or over the phone. The person should also be asked for old photographs, articles, awards, and other biographical material, anything that can be incorporated into the final exhibit and the interview itself. For example, you may want to show an old photograph during the interview, seeing if it can take the person back to that time and trigger a candid and powerful response.

Friends and family are also rich potential sources of information. They may be able to relate an interesting anecdote or story about the person that can be referenced in the interview. They are also likely to have important insights into the person, such as what motivates them to do the work that they do. Colleagues, associates, and clients can also produce good tidbits of information.

The Internet is another invaluable resource. At search engines like www.google.com, you can enter the person's name and do a search for all related web sites. If the person has been the subject of previous articles or profiles, they are likely to be found here.

The local library can also be a good place to do research. Not only can the librarians be helpful, but back issues of local newspapers can also uncover articles and profiles of the hero. Local historical societies can also be a useful resource.

The Interview

There is a real skill to interviewing. Generally, questions should be open-ended so that they can produce candid, free flowing responses. It is also helpful to begin the interview with simple questions that allow the person to get used to the camera and the fact that he/she is being interviewed. Asking them questions such as "where were you born and raised?" or "how many brothers and sisters do you have?" can put them at ease.

Once you have asked these initial questions, you can move into the more challenging ones. For example, the person may have lived through the Holocaust and can shed light on how events transpired. In this example, you would want to ask open-ended questions, such as "tell us what it was like to live during those times?" or "how did it feel to witness those events?"

Getting B-Roll

B-Roll is secondary, non-dialogue footage used to show the person in a setting other than the interview. It is often used in conjunction with an interview, so that the viewer doesn't have to always see a "talking head" on screen. The footage can be as simple as someone answering the telephone or walking down a hall. B-Roll footage will be critical when you begin to edit. As you will see, it can be used to show the context of your hero, as well as help to hide certain editing cuts.

Production Tips to think about:

- Make sure that the backdrop for the interview is interesting and makes a connection with your subject.
- Set up the interview so that the person is not looking directly into the camera.
- Choose a quiet location so that there will be no audio complications.
- Think about the audio. Use an external microphone if you

- have one.
- Get room tone!
 - Film more B-Roll than you think you will need. Lots of B-Roll is helpful to have in the editing process to cover certain cuts (see editing techniques).
 - Make sure that the lighting is appropriate.
 - We recommend that you use a tripod for the interviews to stabilize the camera.

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