

the
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Interviews for Articles

Interviews can be a really powerful tool when writing an article. They can enhance your point, bring emotion into the piece or be used as evidence to back something up. However interviewing can be scary! Here are some tips to help you bring your articles to life with interviews.

1. Research

The best thing is to be prepared – even though you might be using the interview to get more information, having a basic understanding of the topic will allow you to ask more meaningful questions. But also research your interviewee! Understand how their knowledge will help you. This also includes knowing what angle you want the story to take, what message you are trying to get across to the reader. Having a clear 'goal' will help with your research and question setting.

3. Basic Questions

Have Qs prepared! Ask basic questions – where they're from, age (if appropriate), how to spell their name, consent to being recorded!! But also don't be scared to ask follow up questions that you haven't prepared if something is really interesting/needs clarifying!

2. Your audience

Who is going to read this piece? Knowing if you are writing to a specialist audience or a lay audience will greatly influence what type of questions you ask. If you are asking a physicist questions for a piece intended for a lay audience you could ask them: "How would explain the concept of XYZ to an 8 year old?" The audience could influence what format the interview takes – in person, over the phone, email etc

4. Approachable

The best interviewers are approachable, they make the interviewee feel at ease.

Be compassionate, sympathetic if tackling hard subjects, be interested when talking about someone's work but most importantly LISTEN! Even though you are recording the interview, actively listen so you can ask meaningful Qs and so the interviewee wants to keep sharing. Off the record means off the record!!! Don't talk about yourself, this interview is not about you. Do steer the convo to stay on track with your 'goal'.

5. Open Qs

Building on point 3, never ask questions that the interviewee can simply answer yes or no to. Always ask open-ended questions to allow them to elaborate and tell a story. Be flexible and ask the interviewee to repeat something if you need to!

6. Tackle controversy last

If you have to tackle something controversial do it last, in case the interviewee becomes hostile and refuses to answer further questions. Always be impartial and take the stance of curiosity/wanting to know more rather than accusing. E.g. "How do you respond to people saying XYZ?" Also do not be scared of pauses or silences, do not fill every second, the interviewee needs time to think!

7. Record

Always record your interviews and ask consent. You will need to go back to get the exact wording for verbatim quotes – you will not remember the exact words!!

8. End

Always end with asking if the interviewee has anything else to add to ensure you have left nothing out. Also finish on time, your interviewee may have limited time – respect that.

How to add quotes into an article

The reason you are interviewing an expert/witness/opposition and proposition/someone with lived experience is to enhance your article. So if you are adding quotes in a bit randomly, take a step back and think why are you adding quotes into an article? How will this benefit the reader's experience?

- If you are putting something in quotation marks, it has to be verbatim (hence record your interviews!)
- Avoid a massive chunk of transcript in quotes, keep the quotes succinct and relevant and use sparingly. One quote per paragraph is enough.
- You can quote without quotation marks if you are not quoting verbatim e.g. Mr. Brown find the experience very stressful and described how it haunted him for months vs "I thought the whole situation was extremely stressful and if I am honest it still haunts me now, months afterwards", said Mr. Brown.
- If you need to fill in missing information in a direct quote, use square brackets e.g. "The area [Port meadow] was flooded for weeks!"
- Use partial quotes only if unusual language is used e.g. The Mayor "smacked his leg" in surprise.
- Follow the OxSci Style Guide with regards to exact usage of quotation marks vs speech marks and punctuation regarding quotes
- <https://www.wikihow.com/Use-Quotation-Marks-in-News-Articles>

Useful links

- <https://www.theopennotebook.com/2021/04/27/how-to-find-scientist-sources-and-plan-interviews/>
- <https://www.theopennotebook.com/2023/09/26/the-art-of-crafting-effective-interview-questions/>
- <https://www.theopennotebook.com/2022/02/22/reporting-on-scientific-controversy/>
- <https://www.theopennotebook.com/2018/12/11/how-to-conduct-difficult-interviews/>
- <https://www.theopennotebook.com/2021/09/14/please-dont-ignore-me-requesting-interviews-with-scientists/>
- <https://www.theopennotebook.com/2018/03/27/interviewing-for-career-spanning-profiles/>