



# Center for Writing and Speaking

## A NO. 9 IN THE CENTER FOR WRITING AND SPEAKING HANDOUT SERIES

### Conducting an Interview

*Conducting an interview can be both a challenging and rewarding experience. Here are some tips to assist you in making the most out of it!*

#### Before the interview

- **Research, research, research!** Find out as much information as possible about your subject before the interview in order to get the richest perspective possible during the interview.
- **Brainstorm your goals for the interview.** Be specific about what you're trying to find out, then create a list of questions with these goals in mind. Think of creative ways to get the interviewee to "explain" or "describe" what it is you want to find out. Avoid questions that can simply be answered with a "yes" or "no." Instead, develop questions that are both open-ended and specific.
- **Use a voice recorder.** If you utilize a voice recorder, you can spend more time noting non-verbal responses, and less time scurrying to write down every word that has been said. By having an accurate account of both words and observations of body language, you will have a better representation of the interviewee.

#### During the interview

- **Be flexible.** Let your questions serve as a guide rather than a strict script.
- **Ask follow-up questions.** If you're trying to find out something specific, it's okay to probe until you find out what you need to know. Just remember to ask open-ended questions to get to the point!
- **Maintain eye contact.** Although you may want to take some notes during the interview, you do not want to be consumed in writing things down. Your focus should be on listening!
- **Pay attention to body language.** Often times, the *way* a person responds to a question is more insightful than the answer itself. Did they respond enthusiastically or reluctantly? Was the response immediate or delayed? Did their face brighten up when you asked a particular question, or did they cringe or flinch?

#### After the interview

- **Be sure to thank your interviewee for their time.** A thank you card or e-mail should suffice. Offer to share your finished product with them.
- **When in doubt, ask for clarity.** It's better to ask than to misrepresent the interviewee's opinions.
- **Be open to change.** You may feel like your original thoughts about the interviewee have changed. Work with that change! Don't be afraid to critically analyze your new perceptions.
- **Check the assignment.** Keep in mind what instructions you have for your assignment and arrange your information accordingly.

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