



## Interview Tip Sheet

When doing research, people can be one of the most valuable resources available to us. Just as we need processes and skills to find information in print and electronic resources, we also need processes and skills to obtain good information from people. If you are conducting primary research by interviewing someone, one of the most important things to focus on is creating good questions.

You will want to interview people who have special knowledge about your topic. Think about whom you know who knows something related to your topic. Ask your teacher or other adults for suggestions. Consult the phonebook or use a search engine to find names of experts on your topic.

**Types of Interviews-** There are several different types of interviews. Choose the best one based on what kind of technology you have available to you, the availability of the individual you are interviewing, and how comfortable you feel talking to people. Consider:

- **Face-to-Face Interviews:** Face-to-face interviews are when you sit down and talk with someone. You can adapt your questioning to the answers of the person you are interviewing. You will want to use recording equipment for this type of interview.
- **Phone Interviews:** When you need to interview someone who is geographically far away, who is too busy to meet with you to talk, or who does not want to use technology, phone interviews work well. You need to be able to take very good notes for this type of interview.
- **Email Interviews:** Though less personal than face-to-face or phone interviews, email interviews are convenient for most individuals. You may not get as much information from someone in an email interview because you are not able to ask follow-up questions, so you will want to be very careful to prepare good questions.
- **Chat/Messaging/Video Interviews:** Depending on the technology and support available to you, these are good options.
- **An Old-fashioned Letter:** You can also write a letter to request information. Check at the end of articles in periodicals for lists of names and addresses where more information can be obtained. Your librarian can assist you in locating current periodicals related to your topic. If your project deals with a product, find the address of the manufacturer. Send your letter as early as possible to allow time for a response.

### Arranging an interview

Before contacting the persons you want to interview, you must prepare. Begin by making a list of questions that you want to ask. When your list of questions is complete, prepare your own personal information. Then you are ready to make your call. When arranging an interview, be polite and professional. Explain to the person being interviewed who you are, what project you are working on and what you want to talk them about. Not everyone you contact will be willing to be interviewed, but most people will be more than happy to assist you.

Simple rules of courtesy will better ensure that the person you call will be willing to help.  
Be sure to:

- Identify yourself.
- Identify the school you attend and your teacher.
- Briefly explain why you are calling. Include information about your project and explain how the person can help you.
- Request an interview time that is convenient for the person. Let the person know how much time you would like. Ask how much time they have available.
- Ask if you may record the interview. You can get more information if you are not trying to write down all the answers.
- The person may be free when you call, so be prepared to start the interview then.
- Arrive on time, and be ready to start the interview immediately. Be courteous and end the interview on time.
- Thank the person for their time and the information they provide.
- Be sure to send a written thank-you note after the interview. To do this, you will need the person's name and address.

### **Interview do's and don'ts**

- Carefully prepare your questions well ahead of time. Ask someone to look at them.
- Make sure you have tested your recording equipment and know how to use it.
- Come to the interview prepared. Learn as much as you can about the person you are going to interview before the interview takes place.
- Start the interview with some small talk to give both yourself and the person you are interviewing a chance to get comfortable.
- Pay attention to what is being said during the interview and ask interesting and relevant follow up questions.
- Be courteous and respectful of the person you are interviewing. If he or she does not want to talk about an issue, you should respect that desire.
- Avoid questions that are biased, confusing or wordy.
- Be flexible. If an interesting subject comes up that relates to your research, be ready to ask additional questions about it.
- Stay on track. Try not to let the person you are interviewing get off topic. If the conversation drifts, redirect the conversation to the subject at hand.

These guidelines will assist you to have the best possible interview with your resource. Be open to possibilities. This interview experience may change your career path or result in a new friend or important mentor. Good luck and happy interviewing!

Adapted from:  
Janice VanCleave's *Guide to the Best Science Fair Projects*, Janice VanCleave (John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1997)  
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