



Interviewing

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Rationale

Student reporters need to know the types of sources they can and should collect information from. Journalists spend more of their time on the reporting side with sources than they do writing. Otherwise, we'd just call them writers. Knowing the types of sources will make a story stronger by having multiple sources to give credibility to the report.

CLASS GOAL: We will learn the types of sources journalists use.

INDIVIDUAL GOAL: I will develop a source plan for a story idea.

Goals for Understanding

Students will understand & demonstrate

- Documents can be used as sources
- Using direct observations
- Use witnesses, audience members, experts and authority
- And trust, but verify, information from people who may have an axe to grind or something to gain

Overview & Timeline

This lesson is designed to be completed in two, 45-minute class periods with students split into groups of four, but may be completed in one depending on class period length.

Lesson includes

- Warm up activity/preactivity assessment
- Direct instruction
- Cooperative learning activity
- Closing/post-activity assessment

Materials Needed

- "Sources Instructional Sheets" cut for each group
- "Source Group Worksheet" for each student
- "Sources Plan for Story" for each student
- "Axe to Grind Worksheet" cut into one strip for each student

Day 1

WARM UP ACTIVITY: Show Slides 2 & 3 of the slideshow and have students individually complete the activity with a 2-minute time limit. Then, direct students to go around their group explaining and justifying each of their results using the round-robin method for 20 seconds per student. Use a timer application or website to show the students how much time is left. Audibly signal when it is time to switch group members and ensure everyone is talking. Slide 4 has the correct version the teacher can use to preview the lesson.

INSTRUCTIONAL ACTIVITY: Have each group member pull one of the four "Sources Instructional Cards" and read to themselves for 1-2 minutes. Then, have each student spend 30 seconds explaining to the group members the different concepts they learned on their card.

Then, hand students the "Source Group Worksheet" and explain the instructions. Students will each be the group's expert in one type of source and make a suggestion on the story idea for a source they could use to report on the topic.

Give students 1 minute to read Story Idea 1, write a suggestion for a potential source and pass their paper to the right. They should right the same name or type of person (if they don't know a name) on every paper in the group. By the end, each paper should have the same information in Story 1. They should conduct a round robin for each member to explain why they chose the source they did. If the group disagrees, they can coach the member to correct the mistake or to make their answer more specific.

Then, they repeat the whole process for Story 2, 3 and 4 — read, write & pass papers, discuss, coach if needed.

FAST GROUPS: If a group gets through the worksheet quickly. Have them go a second time, adding another in each category until all groups have finished.

EXAMPLE: Sarah, Joseph, Tracy and Elaine are in Group 1. Sarah will write all the observations, Joseph all the witnesses, Tracy all the experts, and Elaine all the documents. Each reads the topic, writes as specific a name or type of person they can interview, then pass around until all four papers have a complete Story Idea 1. They then discuss each choice before repeating Story Idea 2, 3 and 4.

DIRECT INSTRUCTION: Slide 5 covers the concepts students should've learned.

EXIT TICKET/CLOSING ACTIVITY: Have all students complete the "An Axe to Grind" exit ticket.

Day 2

WARM UP ACTIVITY: Have each group go in a round robin to discuss their answers to the exit ticket from Day 1.

PRACTICE ACTIVITY: (Instructions on Slide 6) Have each student grab something to write with, paper/notebooks, and go to a classroom. They should ask the teacher for permission, stay for 15 minutes and document what they observe.

NOTE: Teach students how to politely ask a teacher to observe their classroom. They may be unaware.

When they come back, give them the "Source Plan for Story" and have them complete the worksheet.

After completing the worksheet individually, have students pass their paper around with other students writing additions, critiques, what they would cut, and other notes to help improve the newsworthiness and quality of the idea.

EXIT TICKET/CLOSING ACTIVITY: Students should make any corrections to their story idea pitch and turn it in.

References

- Etwell, J., Balmeo, M., Austin, E., & Hamm R. (2021). *Journalism: Publishing Across Media*. The Goodheart-Willcox Company.
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Documents: Read All About It

SOURCES

Paper Trail

Documents are any type of source written down somewhere. That can be a book, news article, government file, police record, meeting minutes, websites, academic articles, and much more. Unlike people, documents — once you have them — can't be taken back like words can. Though, they can be faked or inaccurate.

As Sources

Verified documents give us information & facts to beef up the credibility of the story, but also can serve as the source of story ideas. Public information can reveal plans to expand the school, what businesses are coming to town, and academic research related to hotly debated current events you may end up reporting on.

Think About It!

Story idea: Are more girls dress coded than boys?

What type of documents could you use to answer the story idea?

Observations: Use Your Eyeballs

SOURCES

Be There

Your senses are like a giant butterfly net catching information, ready for painting a picture for readers. Use these to spot stories, but also to add details in your reporting. You have to be there to do so.

What do you see? What did you hear? What did it smell and feel like? What did the food, water or air taste like?

No Citation Needed

With any piece of information, reporters should cite a source. However, observations need none if the reporter witnessed it directly. They are the source.

If a reporter saw two people jump out of a burning building, they can write that.

If you do this, just be sure you are right.

Think About It!

Story idea: Are more girls dress coded than boys?

What type of observations could you make to answer the story idea?

Witnesses & Audience: Power to the People

SOURCES

Humanity is the Heart

People are the core function of journalism. We report not just for people, but for our audience. The audience can be a tool in a journalist's toolkit. During natural disaster, media outlets can deputize readers as honorary journalists by asking for photos, description of damage, and sharing heartwarming and heartbreaking stories.

They Saw It First

Some audience members are also eye witnesses to a news event or were involved themselves. While they won't always give you the most clear-cut data, they usually give you the small details, sequence of events, emotion, opinion, and other vital parts to a news event that experts and authority don't always.

Think About It!

Story idea: Are more girls dress coded than boys?

What type of witnesses or members of the audience could you use to answer the story idea?

Experts & Authority: If You Know, You Know

SOURCES

Study for Your Life!

Professors, research institutions and other academics spend their lives to be experts on topics. Some perform research and studies. These are formal experts.

There are also informal experts — people who are super fans of TV shows, collectors, some hobbyists, and others whose experience drives expertise.

Who's In Charge?

Those in authority — people who have control or assigned to oversee areas — often have access to insider data, reasonings why certain policies and practices exist, and plans for the future.

Authorities, though, sometimes try to keep information from you or attempt to squash a story they don't like. Don't let them.

Think About It!

Story idea: Are more girls dress coded than boys?

What type of experts or authority figures could you use to answer the story idea?

Trust, But Verify

SOURCES

An Axe to Grind

Sources who have a bias against a story have an axe to grind — some reason they don't or do want the information published. If so, they may attempt to mislead, divert attention or straight up lie. You still have to interview people, even if you don't know their biases. All people are biased — even reporters; just be aware information they give needs fact checked. Trust, but verify.

Something to Gain

Other sources you should especially fact check are those who may benefit from information being published — the opposite of those with an axe to grind. Sometimes this is obvious, but not always.

Politicians, for example, cherry pick information to make their policies look best. They just don't tell you the bad stuff.

Think About It!

Story idea: Are more girls dress coded than boys?

What types of people would have an axe to grind or something to gain with a story answering this story idea?

Source Group Worksheet

NAME: _____

Instructions

Decide in the group who will come up with the idea for each type of source. You will specialize in one kind of source to recommend for the group's story ideas you were assigned below. You will fill out the source recommendation for Story 1, then pass to the next person and fill out the same spot on the sheet you are handed. This happens until all group members jointly complete Story 1.

Next, stop and discuss why each of you chose the sources you did and make any corrections the group feels needs changed. Continue this same process with the three other stories. By the time you are complete, you should have completed four story source plans and had four discussions with your group.

Story Idea 1 **Are students tardy to class less since the new bell schedule started?**

Observations

What observations could you make that help answer the premise?

Documents

What documents, websites or data could help answer the premise?

Witnesses/Audience

What witnesses or readers you interview could help answer the premise?

Experts/Authority

What experts or authorities could help answer the premise?

Story Idea 2 **How protected is the school district from cybersecurity threats?**

Observations

What observations could you make that help answer the premise?

Documents

What documents, websites or data could help answer the premise?

Witnesses/Audience

What witnesses or readers you interview could help answer the premise?

Experts/Authority

What experts or authorities could help answer the premise?

Story Idea 3 **How many students are choosing workforce over higher education?**

Observations

What observations could you make that help answer the premise?

Documents

What documents, websites or data could help answer the premise?

Witnesses/Audience

What witnesses or readers you interview could help answer the premise?

Experts/Authority

What experts or authorities could help answer the premise?

Story Idea 4 **What effect does depression have on academic success in school?**

Observations

What observations could you make that help answer the premise?

Documents

What documents, websites or data could help answer the premise?

Witnesses/Audience

What witnesses or readers you interview could help answer the premise?

Experts/Authority

What experts or authorities could help answer the premise?

Source Plan for Story

NAME: _____

Instructions

After making your observations in the classroom, use the worksheet below to develop a story idea and source plan for that idea.

Observations

What is **ONE** interesting observation you made about each below?

Location

What about the place you were at was interesting?

Teacher

What was interesting about the teacher?

Student Behavior

What was interesting about the way one or more students behaved?

Fashion

What was something interesting you noticed about what they wore?

Language

What was interesting about the way they spoke?

Interactions

What was interesting about the lesson, discussions or student interactions?

Story Idea

What story could you write inspired by your observations?

Inspired by the Location

IN THE FORM OF A QUESTION, what story would be interesting when thinking about where you observed?

Inspired by the People

IN THE FORM OF A QUESTION, what story would be interesting when thinking about the adults and/or students you observed?

CHOOSE ONE OF THE STORY IDEAS YOU MADE ABOVE.

Source Plan

What sources would help? Write a name/type of person in each box.

Observations

What observations could you make that help answer the premise?

Documents

What documents, websites or data could help answer the premise?

Witnesses/Audience

What witnesses or readers you interview could help answer the premise?

Experts/Authority

What experts or authorities could help answer the premise?

Collecting

How would you go about getting the interviews, data and observations?

Observations

What more could you observe to add to your story?

Documents

How will you obtain those documents? (Go with your first instinct if unsure.)

Witnesses/Audience

How will you locate or find these witnesses/audience members?

Experts/Authority

How will you find those experts? (Go with your first instinct if unsure.)

An Axe to Grind

NAME: _____

Consider This Scenario

You are assigned to report on the city's upcoming election for mayor. While asking around, the current mayor's opponent says they have information exposing the mayor as corrupt. Specifically, they show you documents from the mayor's official email account giving multimillion dollar construction projects to his brother. The emails appear to be real but are scanned copies of original emails. The opponent says he will help you out if he's elected.

Why would they give this information to you? What do they have to gain?

Write your response below.

Should you still investigate?

If so, why & how do you verify this is true? If not, why?

Write your response below.

An Axe to Grind

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Should you still investigate?

If so, why & how do you verify this is true? If not, why?

Write your response below.

Rationale

Like any profession, there is a strategy to doing a job well. Journalists have to anticipate how sources may respond to questions, what their answers could be, and prioritize the information they need most. All of which first requires a basic understanding of the common types of questions and their purposes.

CLASS GOAL: We will learn about open- and closed-ended questions, leading questions, when to prefer closed-ended questions, and challenging questions.

INDIVIDUAL GOAL: I will write questions for a story using the different types.

Goals for Understanding

Students will understand & demonstrate

- Closed-ended questions are ones with limited- or single-word answers,
- Open-ended questions require the source to provide longer answers,
- While we prefer open-ended questions, closed-ended questions get us some details and basic information we also need,
- Avoid leading questions that assume something not already established or known before or during the interview,
- And, some questions may force the interview to end that are challenging, such as questioning a person in authority's integrity to get a response to a claim or interviewing someone's loved one soon after they died.

Overview & Timeline

This lesson is designed to be completed in two, 45-minute class periods with students split into groups of four, but may be completed in one depending on class length.

Lesson includes

- Warm up activity/preactivity assessment
- Direct instruction
- Cooperative learning activity
- Closing/post-activity assessment

Materials Needed

- "Types of Questions Instructional Cards" cut for each group
- "Types of Questions Practice Cards" cut for class
- "Types of Questions Practice Worksheet" for each student

Day 1

WARM UP ACTIVITY: Show Slides 2 & 3 of the slideshow and have students individually complete the activity with a 2-minute time limit. Then, direct students to go around their group explaining and justifying each of their results using the round-robin method for 20 seconds per student. Use a timer application or website to show the students how much time is left. Audibly signal when it is time to switch group members and ensure everyone is talking. Slide 4 has the suggested answer the teacher can use to preview the lesson.

INSTRUCTIONAL ACTIVITY: Have each group member pull one of the four "Types of Questions Instructional Cards" and read to themselves for 1-2 minutes. Then, have each student spend 30 seconds explaining to the group members the different concepts they learned on their card.

Then, pass out the "Types of Questions Practice Cards" — one to each student. They will engage in a mix-pair-share activity: Students will mix around the room (make them actually mix) and pair up with someone. The pair should ask each other the question on their card and answer. If they got it wrong, the other student should coach them to the right answer, not tell them right away. Talk with students about how to help one another if they see a student struggling. Then, have them mix-pair-share again with someone they have not already paired with. They should do this for about 5-10 minutes or until the class has roughly cycled through everyone. Students then return to their seats. This assignment can also be done with the stand-up, hand-up, pair-up method depending on teacher preference.

Finally, have students read and complete the activity on the "Types of Questions Practice Worksheet" individually. They should completely fill out all 24 questions.

DIRECT INSTRUCTION: Show students Slide 5 to recap the information they should have learned.

EXIT TICKET/CLOSING ACTIVITY: Have all students pick two questions they are unsure of if they got right and trade with a group member.

Day 2

WARM UP ACTIVITY: Hand students each of their "Practice Worksheets" back. Have groups review and discuss what a leading question is. Then, pass their paper to the right in their group. Have each group scan through each question the other person wrote, seeing if there are any leading questions. If so, have them make a suggestion about how to fix the problem.

PRACTICE ACTIVITY: Have students line up in order of who lives farthest to closest to campus. (This is for fun, but also helps them get to know one another more and randomize the group.) Divide the line into pairs. They will be interviewing each other.

Once students are paired, have them quickly name something they do for fun outside of school. Give them 2 minutes to discuss their hobby and have them return to their desks. They have 10 minutes to write at least 10 questions that they will interview the other person with to find out more information about why their partner likes the activity they described. Eight of them must be open-ended and two can be either open or closed ended depending on how little they know about the activity.

After 10 minutes, divide the remainder of the class in half and have the older of the pair interview the younger first. Then switch and let the other interview.

NOTE: This is a good time to introduce the idea of follow-up questions and the preferred method of recording interviews.

EXIT TICKET/CLOSING ACTIVITY: Have students write one difficult experience they had with the interview they didn't expect and submit using the teacher's preferred method.

References

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- Hawthorne, B. (2019). *The Radical Write*. Jostens.
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Open-Ended: Longer Answers

TYPES OF QUESTIONS

Tell Me More

Open-ended questions force sources to provide longer answers — usually about opinion, analysis, experiences or emotion. They would not be answering the question if they answered in a word or two.

Why did you take the job? What do you remember about the experience? How did you end up in charge?

Why? Why? Why?

Sometimes people have a dry response, even to an open-ended question. Embrace your inner 4-year-old: Follow-up with a version of “why?” If you make people justify their first answer, you usually get a solid quote.

“It was good.” “Why was it good?” “I got to see all of my friends finally in one place.”

Ask It!

You’ve been assigned to write a story about the tennis captain resigning from the team.

What is an open-ended question you may ask them reflecting on their experience on the team?

Closed-Ended: One-Word Answers

TYPES OF QUESTIONS

Yep. Nope. Good. Bad.

Many cub reporters ask questions assuming the source will elaborate. Many do not. When you want to get good, juicy quotes, avoid closed-ended questions, which allow the source to get away with limited- or one-word responses.

“Did you enjoy the game?” is unsurprisingly met with “Yeah.” This is on the reporter, not the source.

Tricky, but Still Closed

There are questions that sometimes seem posed as open-ended that are still closed. “How did the team do?” may seem to be open. However, “good” is a correct response to answer the question fully.

To avoid this, ask questions with more detail to get the actual reaction you’re looking for. “What strategies did you hope the team would execute tonight?”

Ask It!

You’ve been assigned to write a story about the tennis captain resigning from the team.

What would a closed-ended question be that a reporter might ask, but wants a longer answer?

Avoid Leading Questions

TYPES OF QUESTIONS

Don’t Assume

Leading questions are ones that assume a fact never established in the first place. Lawyers famously use the example, “When was the first time you beat your wife?” without first establishing the person actually beat their wife first.

“Why don’t you like the dress code?” assumes the person has an issue with it when they may not.

Be Neutral

Think about your question: Am I assuming something about them I already don’t know? If so, rewrite the question to let them tell you the information, even if you are correct from the start.

“Why don’t you like the dress code?” becomes “What are your thoughts on the dress code?”

Ask It!

You’ve been assigned to write a story about the tennis captain resigning from the team.

What could be a leading question with a false assumption if you are asking the captain about their resignation from the team?

Fact-Finding Needs

TYPES OF QUESTIONS

Inquiring Minds Want to Know

Many beginning reporters mistake “prefer open-ended questions” (to get longer answers) with “NEVER ask closed-ended questions.” When you need simple answers, it’s OK to ask simple questions.

“When is the dance?” “Tuesday at 8 p.m.” This is important for people wanting to go.

Name of the Dog

Closed-ended questions actually increase the quality of storytelling when used intentionally. Journalists love to say “Get the name of the dog.” By asking tiny details, they help paint a mental picture.

“He walked his dog down the road.” becomes “He walked his 3-year-old poodle, Linda, two blocks down to the corner store on his work break.”

Ask It!

You’ve been assigned to write a story about the tennis captain resigning from the team.

What is a closed-ended question you should ask the captain regarding the story?

Challenging Questions

TYPES OF QUESTIONS

Too Much to Feel

Some situations — particularly sad or bittersweet ones — make otherwise normal questions hard to answer for sources. They could break down and cry to the point they may not be able to continue. This isn’t the journalist’s fault (usually).

Interviewing the mother of a student killed, a challenging question may be one that evokes a powerful memory of the dead.

“What will you miss most about them?” It is a question that will get lots of payoff, but forces the mother to face the permanence of death head on. Be patient and human.

Face the Facts

Other challenging questions may end the interview because the source doesn’t like the question, like confronting a politician about illegal use of taxpayer dollars.

Ask It!

You’ve been assigned to write a story about the tennis captain resigning from the team.

What is a challenging, but fair, question you may ask the captain about their resignation?

Card 1

Answer

Closed-ended question.

Remember To Coach

If your partner is struggling, help them to find the right answer WITHOUT giving away the right answer at first. Let them struggle some.

Card 4

Answer

Closed-ended question.

Remember To Coach

If your partner is struggling, help them to find the right answer WITHOUT giving away the right answer at first. Let them struggle some.

Card 7

Answer

Closed-ended question.

Remember To Coach

If your partner is struggling, help them to find the right answer WITHOUT giving away the right answer at first. Let them struggle some.

Card 10

Answer

Open-ended question.

Remember To Coach

If your partner is struggling, help them to find the right answer WITHOUT giving away the right answer at first. Let them struggle some.

Card 13

Answer

Open-ended question.

Remember To Coach

If your partner is struggling, help them to find the right answer WITHOUT giving away the right answer at first. Let them struggle some.

Card 2

Answer

Closed-ended question.

Remember To Coach

If your partner is struggling, help them to find the right answer WITHOUT giving away the right answer at first. Let them struggle some.

Card 5

Answer

Closed-ended question.

Remember To Coach

If your partner is struggling, help them to find the right answer WITHOUT giving away the right answer at first. Let them struggle some.

Card 8

Answer

Closed-ended question.

Remember To Coach

If your partner is struggling, help them to find the right answer WITHOUT giving away the right answer at first. Let them struggle some.

Card 11

Answer

Open-ended question.

Remember To Coach

If your partner is struggling, help them to find the right answer WITHOUT giving away the right answer at first. Let them struggle some.

Card 14

Answer

Open-ended question.

Remember To Coach

If your partner is struggling, help them to find the right answer WITHOUT giving away the right answer at first. Let them struggle some.

Card 3

Answer

Closed-ended question.

Remember To Coach

If your partner is struggling, help them to find the right answer WITHOUT giving away the right answer at first. Let them struggle some.

Card 6

Answer

Closed-ended question.

Remember To Coach

If your partner is struggling, help them to find the right answer WITHOUT giving away the right answer at first. Let them struggle some.

Card 9

Answer

Open-ended question.

Remember To Coach

If your partner is struggling, help them to find the right answer WITHOUT giving away the right answer at first. Let them struggle some.

Card 12

Answer

Open-ended question.

Remember To Coach

If your partner is struggling, help them to find the right answer WITHOUT giving away the right answer at first. Let them struggle some.

Card 15

Answer

Open-ended question.

Remember To Coach

If your partner is struggling, help them to find the right answer WITHOUT giving away the right answer at first. Let them struggle some.

Card 3

Open or Closed?

Do you know how popular you are among all of faculty, staff and students at both schools?

Card 2

Open or Closed?

Are you aware of the accusations against you that you are mean to students and other faculty?

Card 1

Open or Closed?

What was the final result of the last home game?

Card 6

Open or Closed?

When was the last time you remember having this much fun?

Card 5

Open or Closed?

According to a poll of 400 students, most say school administrators are out of touch; do you agree?

Card 4

Open or Closed?

What is your favorite country you've traveled to during your time in the study-abroad program?

Card 9

Open or Closed?

Why do you think so many students are performing poorly on the freshman standardized test?

Card 8

Open or Closed?

How many times has a student thanked you for doing your job?

Card 7

Open or Closed?

I heard there will be a surprise dance next week as a thank you to seniors. Is that true?

Card 12

Open or Closed?

What would you say is the most difficult part of being a lifeguard at the public pool and why?

Card 11

Open or Closed?

What is your opinion on the dress code for faculty members?

Card 10

Open or Closed?

Why are you choosing to continue teaching instead of retiring?

Card 15

Open or Closed?

How do you feel about people celebrating your success in the world of fine arts?

Card 14

Open or Closed?

Why do team bonding activities work?

Card 13

Open or Closed?

If you feel comfortable, tell me about the last thing you vividly remember before going into the coma.

Question Types Practice

NAME: _____

Instructions

You have been assigned the four stories below. Each will tell you the person who you will interview and some facts about them. Write 3 closed-ended and 3 open-ended questions for each person.

Story 1 **Are students tardy to class less since the new bell schedule started?**

JACOB JINGLE: Another staff member says Jacob is always tardy to class — before and after the new schedule made longer passing periods. They also said he actively tries to be tardy and has more than 100 tardies in the first semester. They said he tries to because he hates rules and is vocal on social media.

Closed-Ended Questions

What questions could help you collect data, facts, or confirm information?

Open-Ended Questions

What questions will help you get in-depth analysis and experiences?

Story 2 **How protected is the school district from cybersecurity threats?**

HEIMER SCHMIDT: The district's director of IT. He oversees all of the cybersecurity issues across all of the schools. He wrote the district's first cybersecurity guidelines, which were put on the school's website. According to his biography online, Schmidt has his master's degree in computer science.

Closed-Ended Questions

What questions could help you collect data, facts, or confirm information?

Open-Ended Questions

What questions will help you get in-depth analysis and experiences?

Story 3 **How many students are choosing workforce over higher education?**

IZZIE SMART: The campus college and career counselor for the last 20 years. She hosts the annual college fair in the cafeteria during lunches and coordinates with representatives from higher education, local employers and military recruiters every day. She works most closely with honors graduates.

Closed-Ended Questions

What questions could help you collect data, facts, or confirm information?

Open-Ended Questions

What questions will help you get in-depth analysis and experiences?

Story 4 **What effect does depression have on academic success in school?**

IDA KNOW: The yearbook editor said Ida checked herself into a mental health facility over the summer and has since been released. Ida is an all-A student and agreed to talk with you about her mental health issues — particularly depression and anxiety.

Closed-Ended Questions

What questions could help you collect data, facts, or confirm information?

Open-Ended Questions

What questions will help you get in-depth analysis and experiences?

Rationale

A continuation of "Types of Questions" would be about what questions to ask and in what order. The order can make sources feel more comfortable, guarantee usable information and elicit more colorful quotes. When done poorly, order can quickly end an interview, make quotes less quality or leave you without vital information.

CLASS GOAL: We will learn the proper order to ask questions, anticipating the source's ability to answer, researching before an interview and understanding a story's needs.

INDIVIDUAL GOAL: I will write questions for an interview based off a fictional situation in the right order and to get basic facts, but done in a fair manner.

Goals for Understanding

Students will understand & demonstrate

- Ask questions in order of least to most challenging to guarantee you get the information you need and to build confidence in the source
- Know what sources can and can't answer as a matter of fairness and confidence building
- Know what questions a story requires, and research ahead of time to prevent looking ill prepared in front of the source
- And ask detailed questions if the source needs to answer about a specific moment; otherwise keep it simple for them to elaborate.

Overview & Timeline

This lesson is designed to be completed in two, 45-minute class periods with students split into groups of four, but may be completed in one depending on length.

Lesson includes

- Warm up activity/preactivity assessment
- Direct instruction
- Cooperative learning activity
- Closing/post-activity assessment

Materials Needed

- "Writing Questions Instructional Cards" cut for each group
- "Sample Interview 1 & 2" — printed individually or front and back
- "Source Questions List" printed for each student

Day 1

WARM UP ACTIVITY: Show Slides 2 & 3 of the slideshow and have students individually complete the activity with a 2-minute time limit. Then, direct students to go around their group explaining and justifying each of their results using the round-robin method for 20 seconds per student. Use a timer application or website to show the students how much time is left. Audibly signal when it is time to switch group members and ensure everyone is talking. Slide 4 has the correct version the teacher can use to preview the lesson.

INSTRUCTIONAL ACTIVITY: Have each group member pull one of the four "Writing Questions Instructional Cards" and read to themselves for 1-2 minutes. Then, have each student spend 30 seconds explaining to the group members the different concepts they learned on their card.

Then, hand each student copies of both "Sample Interview 1 & 2" worksheets. The group should split into two pairs. Each will role play one of the people on the interview and read it out loud, making notes along the way or after the roleplay activity. Once they finish reading the script, the pair should write a top two list of the best practices the reporter showed and a top two worst practices list the reporter showed. Then, the entire group comes back together to compare their lists and make a top three list of each as a group.

They will split up again, now partnering with a different group member and repeat the process for "Sample Interview 2".

EXAMPLE: Sarah, Joseph, Tracy and Elaine are in Group 1. Sarah and Joseph read each role of interview 1, discuss and make a list. All four compare notes and make a top three list for each. Then Joseph and Elaine/Sarah and Tracy are partners and repeat the process.

DIRECT INSTRUCTION: First, lead a class discussion with each group listing off one of their top good and bad practices they saw. Then, show students Slide 5 to recap the information they should have learned and likely picked up on.

EXIT TICKET/CLOSING ACTIVITY: Have students individually write a list of a total of five behaviors to avoid and to do.

Day 2

WARM UP ACTIVITY: Have students read their "Source Plan for Story" worksheet they filled out previously. They should choose one of the sources to interview and write down (anywhere on the sheet) about what they as a reporter would need from the interview and what the source would likely not be able to answer. Then, go in a round-robin discussing their story ideas and the source they chose.

PRACTICE ACTIVITY: Give students the "Source Questions List" and 30 minutes to write 5 closed-ended questions that seek information and 10 story-specific, open-ended questions meant to get analysis, opinion or description of experience.

NOTE: Some students may have chosen complex topics. Assure them it is OK if they have not had time to research the topic yet. They should just be curious.

After they write their questions, have groups pass their papers around the group with each member making a note where one or more questions could be improved. Once all members have looked at one another's papers, they should read over the comments, ask clarifying questions and make revisions as necessary.

Inform students they will need to complete the interview and will be submitting it as a Q&A. (It is recommended advisers give the Q&As to their editors for consideration of publication. Students who do not know what a Q&A is may need to have the basic idea of writing the question, then the person's answer, explained to them.)

EXIT TICKET/CLOSING ACTIVITY: Students should write and submit their current plan to contact and set up an interview with their source. They should not do so until after the next two lessons.

References

- Etwell, J., Balmeo, M., Austin, E., & Hamm R. (2021). *Journalism: Publishing Across Media*. The Goodheart-Willcox Company.
- Harrower, T. (2013). *Inside Reporting: A Practical Guide to the Craft of Journalism*. McGraw-Hill.
- Hawthorne, B. (2019). *The Radical Write*. Jostens.
- Kanigel, R. (2012). *The Student Newspaper Survival Guide*. Wiley-Blackwell.
- Stovall, J. (2009). *Writing for the Mass Media*. Pearson.
- Strunk, W., & White, E. (2000). *The Elements of Style*. Allyn & Bacon.

Order From Least to Most Challenging

WRITING QUESTIONS

Calm the Nerves

Everyone in an interview is nervous at some level. Beginning reporters are afraid of their subject. The subject is afraid of the questions. If you start the interview with the least challenging questions, sources feel more confident in their ability to answer and reporters feel more confident in your ability to ask them. The more confident sources are, the more they talk and give reporters great information.

A Rocky Start

By leading with challenging questions, you could be posing the worst-case scenario for the source. If the question is too challenging emotionally or because it is confrontational, they may stop the interview and leave you with nothing.

If the questions are too intellectually difficult, sources may get more nervous and give worse quotes as you go on.

Order It!

Put these in order.

Why did you decide to get married in high school?

What do you think about people who say you're too young and immature to get married now?

When did you first meet?

What Can They Answer?

WRITING QUESTIONS

Be Fair

Not every person knows every answer. If you ask a question to someone who genuinely doesn't know the answer, it could hurt their confidence and your interview as a result.

A teacher would not necessarily know why the school board voted on a certain policy.

Think Ahead

When thinking of questions, ask yourself "Why am I interviewing this person? What do I need most from them?" Your main reason probably says a lot about their ability to answer.

Asking students for their opinion on dress code is fine. Asking them why admin enforces it makes them guess.

Which is Fair?

Interview questions for a student entering the county fair.

What is your favorite moment of the fair so far?

Why is the fair done during this time of year?

What Do I Need?

WRITING QUESTIONS

Don't Forget Basics

An amusing-yet-frustrating scenario is seeing reporters who return with a stellar interview but fumble when they are asked, "What was their last name?"

When preparing for an interview, the biggest set of questions to write are the facts you have to have so you won't forget when you are deep into the interview.

Start with Most Basic

The first question you should ask is, "Is it OK to record this interview?" Sometimes this is a legal requirement.

After you start recording, you ask, "Can you spell and pronounce your first and last name, and grade (title for adults), for the record?" This builds confidence and gets you information you must have.

Write It!

What are four basic pieces of information you need to know about a story previewing ticket sales starting for prom?

Assume the publication has done no stories on prom thus far.

Research First

WRITING QUESTIONS

Don't Look Dumb

No matter the story, reporters should do even the most basic of research beforehand. Some stories require little research. Others require months of it. With basic stories, don't ask questions that Google could have answered or are common knowledge. Don't ask the football coach how football works. Look it up.

Just Be Smart

Sources appreciate someone who has clearly taken an interest in them. The more a reporter appears (and has) invested into really knowing a topic inside and out, the more information sources will give you because they feel more confident in you and because they don't feel like they have to dumb it down for you to understand.

Which Is Bad?

Interview questions for a student who won a debate tournament.

How did you do at the tournament?

Why do you think you won?

How is your debate style unique?

Sample Interview 1 — After the Soccer Game

INTERVIEWING UNIT

INSTRUCTIONS: Make notes about what went right and wrong in this interview after role playing both parts with another group member. Then, compare notes and come up with the top two good and top two bad things the reporter did.

NAME: _____

Before the Interview

The reporter has been at the boys soccer game all night. It went into overtime and resulted in a tie game with the team's main rival. After the game is over and the field is clearing, the reporter goes over to the head coach with pen and paper, and his recorder. This is what happened when the reporter approached the coach.

Reporter

Reporter taps coach on shoulder.

"Hi, coach. My name is Kieran Smyth with The Bugle. Do you have time for a few questions about tonight's game?"

"Thanks! Just a few questions. First, what how does a tie game happen in soccer?"

"And that's what happened tonight?"

"OK, thanks. How did the game go overall?"

"Oh that's great. I'm glad to hear the team is doing well. What makes the team so good?"

"I know what you mean. I am a big fan of the team. Who all is on the team?"

"No, that's OK. I have a roster I got from the table. Why did you choose to be a soccer coach?"

"Neat. My grandpa wanted me to play once. I just couldn't run that much and it ended up with me getting a broken knee from the first match. A kid from the other team stepped on my knee and absolutely crushed it."

"How has the season gone so far? What is your record?"

"While I think it is important they know that, I am not allowed to make promises about what to put in a story at this point. I apologize."

"I know what you mean. Just a few more questions. Who were the standout players tonight?"

"Right? I totally get that. What are the players doing now after the game?"

"How have they done in previous years?"

"The whole season."

"Great. One more question. What are you looking forward to?"

"Don't worry. I'm writing it, so you have nothing to worry about. See you at school tomorrow, coach!"

Reporter shakes the coaches hand and leaves.

Coach

"Absolutely. Whatcha got?"

"Well, it's not like other sports where there has to be a winner. It's very possible that any game can end in a tie unless it is during playoff season."

"Yes."

"Not too bad for us. We played hard, worked like a team and came out successfully."

"We just are a bunch of hardworking guys."

"There are about 26 guys on varsity right now. Some shift back and forth on JV as we need them, but there are just too many to list off the top of my head without forgetting someone. Can I just email you later?"

"Uh. I guess it had to do with growing up and playing. My dad made me play and my mom would drive me to the pitch every day. It just became a family thing, you know? It's something I hope more kids around here do."

"OK..."

"We're 2-4-1 right now. I think it is a huge success. You look at a record like that and you can't be anything but proud. You should definitely include that in the story. I want to make sure the guys know I'm proud."

"No need to apologize. I get that. I'm just so proud, you know? Couldn't hurt to ask."

"Everyone on the team are winners in my book. You can't put how good someone is in numbers. There isn't a way to judge players from one to the next like that."

"I have no idea. They do their own thing at this point."

"What after games or the whole season?"

"Oh. Got ya. They have done well. Got to love them."

"I'm looking forward to the Whataburger I'm about to inhale. Sorry, I have to go. Hope the article turns out good for us!"

Sample Interview 2 — School Bans Driving

INTERVIEWING UNIT

INSTRUCTIONS: Make notes about what went right and wrong in this interview after role playing both parts with another group member. Then, compare notes and come up with the top two good and top two bad things the reporter did.

NAME: _____

Before the Interview

The story broke over the weekend on social media that Principal Peter Rude banned all students from driving themselves on campus, including students of age and with driver's licenses. This reporter's editor assigned them to figure out why. They set up a meeting and walk into his office.

Reporter

"Mr. Rude?"

"I wish I could say the same.
Thank you for allowing me to interview you anyway."

"Would you mind if I record this interview
to make sure I get everything you say correct?"

"I can't do that. We don't let sources see the material
prior to publication. I'm sure you understand."

"OK. First, can you just state your name, title and age for the record?"

"Thanks. Here's my first question: Why do you hate student drivers?
Some students have to be able to drive to school for work after, or
their parents go to work before they're ever up for school. Aren't you
discriminating against the poor and underaged with this policy?"

"And, why, exactly, is that? You're dodging the question as usual."

"Fair enough. But you still never answered the question
about what reason you canceled the policy..."

"Is that what happened to her?"

"You can break the rules.
It just sounds like you're dodging another question."

"Thank you, next. Since this policy clearly discriminates against the
poor, why should you be in charge of a school that oversees a student
population with more than 70% in bad poverty?"

"I think what's rude is your pompous self sitting there in your throne,
acting like a tyrant while the rest of everyone has to do
your dirty work. I just asked simple questions."

"Because you hate poor people. It's not opinion, it's fact."

"You would relate even more if they could drive to school like you do."

"Yes. Thank you for your time."

"OK, bye."

Principal

"Yes, come on in. Good to see you."

"You're welcome. I'm always a fan of the student press."

"Would you mind not recording? I want to email you all my answers to make sure I
get them right."

"Got it. Then, go ahead. I might just take time to think of my answers."

"Principal Peter Rude, 48"

"Wow. Um. I think it's clear we don't see eye to eye on this issue now. Let's just say it
was the right decision to make the call for this campus at this time."

"I'm not dodging anything. You accused me of something which I do not agree with. I
was answering your question."

"If you must know, last week when Jaimie Gillibrand died in that wreck trying to leave
school, she also took out a person walking on the sidewalk. Sometimes people of
your age aren't the most responsible drivers, especially if they have been consuming
illegal drugs or alcohol."

"I am not legally allowed to comment on that."

"I --"

"I think you're stepping a little out of line. I've been nothing but a fan of the student
newspaper since I've got here. This line of questioning is frankly rude."

"No you didn't. You are saying I should be removed because of what?"

"I came from a home with a disabled mother and my father worked as an electrician.
We didn't have money and I can relate to these kids on that level."

"Look. I'm not going to put students at risk because of accidents. The more we keep
vehicles away, the less likely people are to be hit or have them stolen from school
grounds. It's that easy. Not an easy decision, but a simple concept.
Does that make sense?"

"Don't mention it. I will be talking to your editor and adviser
about your behavior. Just wanted to give you that heads up
and some advice: You don't have to be rude just to be rude. Goodbye."

Source Questions List

INTERVIEWING UNIT

INSTRUCTIONS: Think about what you need to know from this person about your topic, why you chose them to get information from, and what they are going to be able and unable to answer. Then, write thoughtful, relevant questions below.

NAME: _____

Source Name: _____

IN THE SPACE BELOW, WRITE WHY YOU CHOSE THIS SOURCE TO INTERVIEW AND WHAT INSIGHT THEY HAVE INTO YOUR TOPIC.

Closed-Ended Questions

What questions could help you collect data, facts, or confirm information?

1 _____

What information will this help you know?

2 _____

What information will this help you know?

3 _____

What information will this help you know?

4 _____

What information will this help you know?

5 _____

What information will this help you know?

Open-Ended Questions

What questions will help you get in-depth analysis and experiences?

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

4 _____

5 _____

6 _____

7 _____

8 _____

9 _____

10 _____

Rationale

Interviews don't fall out of the sky. The reporter must prepare ahead of time to get the best results and guarantee they have access to their interview afterward.

CLASS GOAL: We will learn ways to prepare for an interview.

INDIVIDUAL GOAL: I will create a plan for an upcoming interview.

Goals for Understanding

Students will understand & demonstrate

- Interviews cannot be done at the last minute and should give the reporter enough time as needed for the story
- The location of the interview determines how comfortable the source is, which can be useful either way depending on the circumstance
- Dress to blend in your surroundings and bring backups of your equipment
- And conduct preinterviews to get a deeper understanding of topics before conducting a more formal interview later on

Overview & Timeline

This lesson is designed to be completed in one, 45-minute class period with students split into groups of four.

Lesson includes

- Warm up activity/preactivity assessment
- Direct instruction
- Cooperative learning activity
- Closing/post-activity assessment

Materials Needed

- "Preparing for the Interview Instructional Sheets" for each group
- "Preparing for the Interview Plan" for each student
- Access to the internet for students to research about their topics

Day 1

WARM UP ACTIVITY: Show Slides 2 & 3 of the slideshow and have students individually complete the activity with a 2-minute time limit. Then, direct students to go around their group explaining and justifying each of their results using the round-robin method for 20 seconds per student. Use a timer application or website to show the students how much time is left. Audibly signal when it is time to switch group members and ensure everyone is talking. Slide 4 has the correct version the teacher can use to preview the lesson.

INSTRUCTIONAL ACTIVITY: Have each group member pull one of the four "Instructional Cards" and read to themselves for 1-2 minutes. Then, have each student spend 30 seconds explaining to the group members the different concepts they learned on their card.

Give each student a half-sheet of "Preparing for the Interview Plan" and have them fill out the top four boxes of the worksheet, which requires them to think through contacting, scheduling, dress and equipment — the technical part of the interview, but a vital one.

After they complete the top half, give students 10 minutes to use the internet to research their topic and/or their person depending on the topic. Then, have each student go around in their groups discussing their topic, source and upcoming interview, asking at least one question to the group seeking feedback to be better prepared for their interview.

DIRECT INSTRUCTION: Slide 5 has a recap of the information students should have learned.

EXIT TICKET/CLOSING ACTIVITY: Have students fill out the bottom half of the worksheet based off feedback from group members and submit for teacher feedback. They should not contact their source until after the final lesson over conducting the interview. However, they may start scheduling and preparing for the interview.

HOMEWORK/EXTRA CLASS

ASSIGNMENT: Students need to complete a preinterview with their source or someone else before their formal Q&A interview with their chosen source.

References

- Etwell, J., Balmeo, M., Austin, E., & Hamm R. (2021). *Journalism: Publishing Across Media*. The Goodheart-Willcox Company.
- Froke, P., & Bajak, F. (2020). *The Associated Press Stylebook*. Basic Books.
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- Kanigel, R. (2012). *The Student Newspaper Survival Guide*. Wiley-Blackwell.
- Stovall, J. (2009). *Writing for the Mass Media*. Pearson.
- Strunk, W., & White, E. (2000). *The Elements of Style*. Allyn & Bacon.

When is the Interview?

PREPARING FOR THE INTERVIEW

Availability

As a scholastic journalist, you have the limitation of only being available during one class, or before/after school. Other students are similarly limited.

Make sure your sources are available and you plan ahead of time before randomly showing up. People don't like surprises.

Don't Limit Yourself

If you are assigned to get quotes about the latest trend on social media, a quick interview works. But if you are interviewing an immigrant student about their refugee status coming from a war-torn country, it is best to give yourself more time to ask questions than standing in the hallway outside a classroom for 5 minutes.

What Should Have Happened?

Reporter comes back angry because a teacher didn't let them pull a student from class. They found and interviewed a junior for 4 minutes an impromptu feature.

Where is the Interview?

PREPARING FOR THE INTERVIEW

To Your Advantage

Sports have what they call home-field advantage. This is true for journalism as well. Sources feel more comfortable in environments familiar to them.

When you want a source to feel at home in the interview, do it where they are. When you need them to be more focused, remove them from their environment.

Digital Interviews

Email, texts, phone calls and social media interviews are for lazy reporters, situations where it is actually impossible to see someone face to face, or clarifying facts after a formal interview.

Digital interviews lead to sterile, uninteresting quotes, or being completely ignored if the source is annoyed or scared.

Your Place or Theirs?

A reporter is wanting to interview the principal about people claiming he lacks school spirit.

If you had the option, should you interview them in their office or in an empty conference room? Why?

What Should I Bring & Wear?

PREPARING FOR THE INTERVIEW

Dress to Match

If you are covering the county fair outside in the heat, do not wear a suit and tie. Not only will you die of heat stroke, but you will stick out like a sore thumb.

Similarly, if you are interviewing the superintendent, don't show up looking like you rolled out of bed 7 minutes before.

Bring Backup

When you go to an interview, it is always good to bring a recorder AND a written way to take notes in case one doesn't work. There is nothing more embarrassing, unprofessional and panic-inducing than thinking you recorded an interview on your phone and you notice after that you never hit the button. Get it the first time.

Think About It!

If you were going to write a story about the kickball tournament on the baseball field, what all would you bring to do your job and for personal needs? What would you wear? Why would you bring and wear those items?

Preinterviews

PREPARING FOR THE INTERVIEW

Go Fish

Especially in complex stories, it may be worth conducting a preinterview — a recorded, on-the-record interview used to collect information used to generate questions for another interview later on. These are helpful when you need to understand a situation more fully to ask better questions down the line.

Tell Me More

Sometimes a preinterview can also divert your story to a more important angle or topic you never expected.

When doing a preinterview on a new standardized test, a source may tell you the angle you are pursuing is actually old news but that you should look more closely at how much they cost.

What Don't You Know?

If you were assigned the story idea below, what would you want to understand more about during a preinterview?

Why did the new head coach switch from a primarily run-focused game from the pass-focus strategy under the old coach?

Preparing for Interview Plan

INTERVIEWING UNIT

INSTRUCTIONS: Research your topic and/or person, discuss with your group (asking for at least one piece of advice on the interview), and fill out the form.

NAME: _____

Topic: _____

What's Their Schedule Like?

When are you available to meet? Could you schedule a before or afterschool meeting? Lunch? Class time? What will limit their schedule?

Where Is Best to Meet?

Would it be better to interview them where they are to make them more comfortable or in a neutral location?

What to Bring?

How will you record the interview electronically? How will you take notes during the interview on paper?

What to Wear?

What will you wear? How formal do your clothes need to be to match the person or environment of your interview? Are school clothes OK?

What Do You Not Know?

What about the topic, person or situation do you not know enough about that would help you to write or clarify questions?

What Do I Need To Know?

What questions or bits of information want to ask the source in a preinterview to make you more informed before the interview?

Preparing for Interview Plan

INTERVIEWING UNIT

INSTRUCTIONS: Research your topic and/or person, discuss with your group (asking for at least one piece of advice on the interview), and fill out the form.

NAME: _____

Topic: _____

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Would it be better to interview them where they are to make them more comfortable or in a neutral location?

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How will you record the interview electronically? How will you take notes during the interview on paper?

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What will you wear? How formal do your clothes need to be to match the person or environment of your interview? Are school clothes OK?

What Do You Not Know?

What about the topic, person or situation do you not know enough about that would help you to write or clarify questions?

What Do I Need To Know?

What questions or bits of information want to ask the source in a preinterview to make you more informed before the interview?

Rationale

Interviews are (usually) friendly battles of the mind. Reporters need information and have to get the source to provide information or perspective. Sources don't know what journalists are looking for or may be unwilling to provide it. These are some battle strategies to help reporters win the fight for information.

CLASS GOAL: We will learn tips on how to conduct an interview like follow-up questions, being confident through body language and professionalism, and proper ways to end an interview.

INDIVIDUAL GOAL: I will prepare, schedule and conduct an interview for a publication Q&A story.

Goals for Understanding

Students will understand & demonstrate

- Before the interview, don't talk about the topic with the subject so they save the best quotes for on-the-record talk, and don't email questions ahead of time
- Act confident through body language
- Be professional as a representative of a media publication
- Don't stick to a list of questions, but ask follow-ups as well to go deeper or find better stories
- And end the interview by thanking them for their time and collect follow-up contact information.

Overview & Timeline

This lesson is designed to be completed in one, 45-minute class periods with students split into groups of four, but may be stretched longer if the teacher wants to repeat activities, have additional projects to accompany the lesson, or have a publication assignment tied to the learning.

Lesson includes

- Warm up activity/preactivity assessment
- Direct instruction
- Cooperative learning activity
- Closing/post-activity assessment

Materials Needed

- "Conducting the Interview Instructional Sheets" cut for each group

Day 1

WARM UP ACTIVITY: Show Slides 2 & 3 of the slideshow and have students individually complete the activity with a 2-minute time limit. Then, direct students to go around their group explaining and justifying each of their results using the round-robin method for 20 seconds per student. Use a timer application or website to show the students how much time is left. Audibly signal when it is time to switch group members and ensure everyone is talking. Slide 4 has the correct version the teacher can use to preview the lesson.

INSTRUCTIONAL ACTIVITY: Have each group member pull one of the four "Conducting the Interview Instructional Cards" and read to themselves for 1-2 minutes. Then, have each student spend 30 seconds explaining to the group members the concepts they learned.

Have students stand up, hand up, mix around the room, and pair up. Instead of any informal greeting like a high five, make students shake hands. Instruct them not to hand over "dead fish" hands nor to crush the bones in their partners hands. They should practice a confident handshake.

Students will mix and pair around the room again, this time introducing themselves in the following way: "Hello, my name is (first and last name) with (your publication name). Nice to meet you" in addition to the handshake. Have each student coach the other to improve or congratulate them. Have them repeat with five other students, even if they already know them.

After introductions, have them mix-pair-ask. They will repeat the introduction, but this time add, "Would you mind if I ask you a question for the (yearbook/newspaper/etc.)?" and ask the question on Slide 5. When their partner answers, they should ask one follow-up question. If they are stuck, their partner should help coach them but not give them a follow-up to ask. Then, the other partner ask the same question, also with one follow-up.

Slides 6-10 have more questions to repeat this as many times as the teacher prefers. Have them repeat this process once more, now requiring two follow-up questions and thanking their partner for their time at the end of the interview.

DIRECT INSTRUCTION: Show Slide 11 to recap what they should have learned.

EXIT TICKET/CLOSING ACTIVITY: Have all students do a 5-minute interview with one person with only the question on Slide 12 to start. The rest must be follow-up questions. When class nears the end, have students write what was most difficult about asking follow-up questions and one trick they found to help them.

References

- Etwell, J., Balmeo, M., Austin, E., & Hamm R. (2021). *Journalism: Publishing Across Media*. The Goodheart-Willcox Company.
- Froke, P., & Bajak, F. (2020). *The Associated Press Stylebook*. Basic Books.
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- Strunk, W., & White, E. (2000). *The Elements of Style*. Allyn & Bacon.

Before the Interview

CONDUCTING THE INTERVIEW

Don't Send Questions

Reporters do not send a list of questions ahead of an interview. Either the source will try to memorize their answers, which never works, or they have time to figure out a way to answer around your question instead of answering directly.

It is perfectly ethical to send topics to discuss and facts they need to review.

Talk About Anything But the Story

When you arrive at the interview, they may try to talk about the story. Especially in broadcast, avoid doing so. The first time they give an interview is the strongest. If they already answered you once, their on-the-record statement is more boring.

What Do You Do?

You want to interview the superintendent about a change in bus transportation, particularly the shortage of actual buses. He asks for your questions ahead of time.

What should you say?

Body Language

CONDUCTING THE INTERVIEW

Confidence is Key

People naturally gravitate toward confident people and feel more comfortable around them. With reporters, confidence tells a source that you are in control of the interview and they are safe to sit back and let the reporter do their job.

Stand up straight. Speak from your gut. Fake confidence if you have to.

No Dead Fish, No Death Grips

When you meet a new source for the first time, shake their hand. If you initiate the handshake, it is the first step in controlling the interview and instilling confidence.

No one feels comforted by a reporter with a limp or bone-crushing handshake.

Think About It!

What do you think you have to work on to practice being more confident in an interview?

Do you consider yourself to be a confident person? Why?

Professionalism

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Don't Be Sloppy

When reporters are overly shy, giggle because they are nervous, use informal language or cuss, or otherwise act like they don't know what they are doing, there is no getting the source to feel comfortable with them.

It is a casual conversation, but still a job that needs to be taken seriously.

Be an Expert

Over time, reporters covering a beat begin to become experts in the field. They get to know people in power and become a fixture of the group or topic they cover.

Two things: First, do this. It will lead to so many story opportunities and better interviews. Second, don't let your familiarity lead to biased choices.

Is Any of This OK?

A reporter walks into an interview with the principal with a bag of Burger King and eats during the interview. The reporter calls the principal "bro" repeatedly and laughs when the principal says she "really cares about kids."

Follow-Up Questions & Your List

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Follow the Story

A list of questions is important to help you have a roadmap and details you have to get. However, maps have detours. Some of those detours are pretty. Follow them.

People may surprise you in an answer and open up an opportunity to explore a potential gold mine of storytelling. Don't just stick to your script.

Get Deeper

Sometimes the detours circle back to the original road. Sources may open up about a personal story you did not know about before. You can always ask a few questions until the new topic is dry, then use your notes to get back on track.

Audiences love details in stories. Following up to get deeper is a way to get them.

What'd I Miss?

What should the reporter followed up on after this response to a question?

"I got into choir because my mom does it for a living and does concerts with a professional choir. I do like our choir though. It's a start and lots of fun."

Ending the Interview

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Thank You

The Constitution may protect what journalists publish, but it doesn't force anyone to talk to us. Only courts have that power. Be sure to not unnecessarily burn any bridges and thank your source for their time, even if they are being a massive jerk. For most people, being interviewed and put in a publication is a big deal.

Following Up

After the interview is finished up, ask them for contact information (phone number and email) in case you need to ask more questions or clarify quotes.

Speaking of, actually follow up with questions or clarify something they said if it doesn't make sense. They'll thank you.

What'd I Miss?

What in this question might a reporter have a follow-up question on later?

"I like to go to that store down the road to get my food. I walk about 4 miles there and back every other day to get it."