

# Conducting Interviews

FOR *Journalism*  
TEACHERS ONLY

<http://jteacher.com>

## Asking the questions to get the answers that tell the story.

**There are three common ways to gather information for a story.**

1. Personal observation--the reporter's eyewitness account (athletic contests, speeches, demonstrations)
2. Printed or written materials--press releases, prior news articles, etc.
3. Interviews--fact, personal, or group

• **Fact interview:** This type of interview is a straightforward question-and-answer conversation intended to get facts and quotations for advance stories or supplementary/follow-up coverage of past events. These are routine interviews and can be conducted over the telephone if necessary.

• **Personal interview:** A more formal approach, also called the feature interview. The reporter should prepare a list of questions ahead of time, but be prepared to take a different path of questioning if the situation calls for it.

• **Group interview:**

1. **Man-on-the-street or inquiring reporter.** The reporter asks the same question of interviewees selected at random. The answers may be limited to one or two sentences, and are printed just as given, with no comment from the reporter. These might be published in an inquiring reporter type of column along with a small picture of the interviewee.

2. **Symposium interview:** The reporter gathers statements from several people, usually authorities or specialists with similar interests or expertise. The statements are compared, contrasted, analyzed or interpreted, and are used as direct and indirect quotes throughout an article.

### Interview Techniques

• **Prepare for the interview**

1. Make an appointment in advance.
2. Learn as much about the topic or person as you can so that you can ask intelligent questions.
3. Know what you want to accomplish in the interview.

• **Conducting the interview**

1. Be on time, with adequate supplies of paper and writing utensils.
2. Introduce yourself and the purpose of the interview.
3. Be friendly and courteous, but remember you have a job to do.
4. Volunteer information only when it is necessary to stimulate the conversation or to get it back on track.
5. Don't interrupt.
6. Avoid overly personal questions.
7. Ask specific, thought-provoking questions; avoid yes-or-no questions.
8. Don't let the conversation run wild, but if an unexpected angle should develop, be prepared to follow it.
9. Take good notes, but don't distract the interviewee while doing so. Use a tape recorder, if you want to, but don't depend on it exclusively.
10. Obtain all the information you think you will need before concluding the interview, but be sure to ask if you can contact your interviewee again if necessary. Get a phone number where he/she can be reached.
11. Go over all quotes with the interviewee to check for accuracy.
12. Thank the interviewee for his/her time.