

Field Research: Conducting an Interview



Purdue OWL Staff

A workshop brought to you in cooperation with the Purdue Online Writing Lab



Outline: How to Conduct an Interview

Topics Covered:

- Setting up the interview
- Preparing for the interview
 - Coming up with Questions
- Meeting with your interviewee
- Following up on your interview





Setting up the Interview

Set-up Etiquette:

1. **Contact** the potential interviewee **in advance**
2. **Arrange a specific time and place**, and let the interviewee know how much time it will take
3. **Identify the topic** you will be discussing





Before the Interview:

1. **Prepare** a list of **questions**
2. **Find background information** about the interviewee
3. **Prioritize** your **questions** and ask the most important first
4. **Decide** your **goals** for the interview



- **Ask yourself: “What do I need to know?”**
 - Write a list of things you want to find out
 - Write questions that will help your interviewee discuss this information
- **Do not ask biased questions: “Don’t you think we could improve campus parking by building another parking garage?”**
- Check carefully to see if your wording could be offensive



How to ask good Questions?

- Ask **leading questions** rather than asking **yes or no questions**:
 - ✗ “Do you think there is a parking problem on campus?”
(Yes or no question)
 - ✓ “What is your view about the parking situation on campus?” (leading question)
- Responses to leading questions will give you more detail to support your research



During the interview, summarize answers back to the interviewee to make sure you understand his/her answer

Q: What is your view about the parking situation on campus?

A: *I think it is a problem, because there are more cars than parking spaces.*

Paraphrase response: So you believe there are not enough parking spaces for the cars on campus?

OWL Meeting the Interviewee

- Always bring a stiff-backed notebook and several trustworthy writing instruments
- If you wish to **tape-record** your interview, ***always ask before doing so***
- **Keep notes** on the interview, **but make sure that you are still talking to the interviewee**, not just scribbling





Meeting the Interviewee (cont.)

- Bring your prepared list of questions
- Try to stick to the topic, but *be flexible* if your interviewee brings up unexpected but valuable information





- If you need to interview via email, remember to **ask for permission first**
- **Establish the scope and time period** of the interview
- Remember that the **same rules of courtesy** still apply





Follow-up Etiquette:

- Always be sure to **thank your interviewee**, in person and in writing
- **Write-up** your **results soon** after the interview while they are still fresh in your mind
- **Let your interviewee review your findings** in order to confirm that you have represented him/her accurately



Conducting a successful interview involves attention to the following steps:

1. Making contact to setup the interview
2. Preparing for the interview
3. Meeting the interviewee
4. Following up on the interview





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The End

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