

Helpful Hints for a Successful Interview

Getting people to share their stories isn't always easy. Follow these tips for a successful interview!

1. **Schedule a time in advance.** This gives everyone a chance to prepare. Try to make it at a time and place when there won't be any distractions or disturbances.
2. **Prepare a list of questions.** (Use the Interview Question Guidelines handout.) Either share them with your relative or friend a day or so before the interview, or give them an idea of what you want to talk about.
3. **Reassure them.** Put your interviewee at ease by telling him or her that he or she will have a chance to see and approve anything that you write before you share it with others.
4. **Bring several pens or pencils.** If you plan to make a recording, be sure to have a tape player, microphone, extra tapes, and batteries. Make sure the tape player is working.
5. **Take good notes.** Make sure you record the date and time, your name, the name of the interviewee, and the relationship you have with that person (aunt, cousin, friend, etc.)
6. **Start with the right question or topic.** Lead off with something you know will get a reply, such as a story you have heard him or her tell in the past.
7. **Avoid "yes" or "no" questions.** These simple answers won't make for a very interesting interview. Try to get facts, feelings, stories, details, and descriptions from the person you interview.
8. **Show interest.** Take an active part in the dialogue without dominating it. Learn to be a creative listener.
9. **Use significant objects when possible.** Old photographs, favorite old songs, and treasured items may bring memories flooding back.
10. **Don't push for answers.** Sometimes people have their own reasons for not wanting to answer a question. If someone is uncomfortable about sharing, move on to another question.
11. **Let them "wander."** Use your prepared questions as a guideline, but don't be afraid to let your interviewee keep on talking. You relative or friend may have many things to say that you never thought to ask!
12. **Don't interrupt or correct them.** This can end an interview in a hurry! You're there to get a story. Ask questions and listen.
13. **Write it up.** After the interview, consider preparing a transcript or written report to give your interviewee to thank him or her for participating in your project.