

Tips for Conducting "In Person" (face-to-face) Interviews

By Jill Black

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If you are a writer or self-publisher that are times when an interview will be required to add an extra dimension, insight or more depth to a project you are working on.

In offline interviewing there are generally three ways to conduct an interview:

- 1) In person (face-to-face interview)
- 2) By telephone
- 3) By mail

In this article I will be focusing on the "In person" (face to face) interview.

Many beginner writers find interviewing a daunting experience and avoid doing interviews even when it would benefit what they are working on and make the project more complete.

Beginners Tip: To overcome your nervousness practice, and then practice some more, on your family and friends before ever requesting your first "live person" interview.

Below you will find a few tips for when the day arrives and you need to conduct THE INTERVIEW ...

Tools you will need:

= Cassette Recorder

= Notebook and Pen

= Press Pass

(I carry my press pass with me to interviews, however, this is not a necessity for carrying out interviews. If you do have a press pass remember to take it along with you though as it is a sign of your professionalism when you introduce yourself)

= Background Research:

Do your homework on the person before going to the interview.

This could involve a search of the persons online press kit page, through media press clippings, at the library, the who's who directory etc.

Having some background knowledge will give you greater self-confidence and will help give a stronger line as to the questions you may want to ask.

Interviews can be 10 minutes, 30 minutes, 1 hour or over the course of a month or more e.g. if you are doing an autobiography.

When you make a time for the interview propose to take at least 30 minutes.

Suggest you go to the persons, home, office or place of business - being in their own environment will put them at ease and may provide the right background to your interview.

Dress appropriately for where you are going, and who you are meeting. As a rule wear clothes that will not cause offence as many people you meet will be very conservative.

= Preparing Questions:

Rule #1 Don't ask stupid questions... and don't ask questions you can find out through research unless it's to confirm a point.

Prepare your list of questions in advance jotting down the questions and points you want to ask in brief heading form (they should be used only as a point of reference during the interview).

Maintain eye contact with the person you are interviewing as much as possible.

Listen carefully and establish a relaxed style of questioning.

Allow the questions to flow according to the context, glancing at your list only to refresh your memory or fill a long pause in the conversation.

Be open to new questions and new points raised during the interview. Flexibility in your interviewing will allow you to pursue interesting or relevant sidelines as they come up. These may be areas of activity that you are unaware of despite your research.

Don't worry about ending up with more information than you require. Use what you need and put the rest in your files to be used at another time.

= Cassette recorder and notebook:

Check the cassette recorder batteries, cassette tape and volume BEFORE you arrive for the interview.

Your cassette recorder should be compact, light and discreet in appearance. I find it best to use a recorder that uses standard size cassettes as they are easier to obtain than micro cassettes if you find yourself in an out of the way place.

After the introductory formalities always ask permission if you can use a recorder BEFORE the interview starts, then produce it and get started on the interview.

Few people object to a cassette recorder but if they do, just use your notebook.

Using a cassette recorder helps establish an easy-going communication between you and the person you are interviewing as you are not constantly looking down take write notes.

Holding the recorder in your non-writing hand allows you to operate the on/off button and to write any notations if needed with your other hand.

Never thrust the recorder in a persons face as they will feel self-conscious, causing them to become tongue-tied and awkward.

Use your notebook for the accurate spelling of names (companies, locations etc), jotting down a few main points and perhaps some question reminders for later.

Be careful when recording that you don't loose concentration as this will "deaden" an interview.

Listen carefully to what is being said and be sure to understand the answers otherwise it will be difficult to write clearly enough for your readers.

If you don't understand something ask! "Can you put it into simpler language?" or "Can you clarify that a little more".

If a person is evasive of a question or doesn't give an answer, ask the question in a different way and at another point in your interview.

If someone gives "off the record information" turn the recorder off. Don't do too many off the record interviews as they don't contribute to the information you require (your time is valuable). Always Guide the interview process, but don't dominate it. If the person strays too far from the subject at hand, then quickly guide the person back. Don't forget to turn the recorder back on when the interview proceeds again.

Tip: When you get home label your cassettes as you fill them so there is no chance of accidentally tapeing over information you want to keep.

Always Keep the cassette on file in case someone should ever claim they have been misquoted.

If the interview is likely to be in any way contentious the cassette should remain in your file for at least a year or two.

= Photographs with the interview:

There are times when you may need to use a photograph of a person for the project you are working on.

TIP: If you take photographs, always get a signed agreement before taking them and as a safeguard for yourself have them sign a Model Release Consent form. There have been many cases when a person's photo has been used without his/her prior consent and the person has sued for modeling fees, invasion of privacy, or for various other reasons.

Take any photos you require at the end of an interview when the person is relaxed.

If possible have the person do something that is relevant to the interview rather than just standing or sitting.

Alternatively photograph the person in surroundings that have meaning to the theme of the interview.

If this is not possible then just take a mug shot (a facial close up) that you can use.

Note: People will sometimes cross out the word electronic on a consent form and only permit their photo to be used in a print publication. For a variety of personal reasons they may not want their picture to be used on the Internet. Always respect their request if this is the case.

= Ask open-ended questions:

Asking open-ended questions instead of ones that invite a yes or no answer will give more interesting responses.

These questions usually begin with who, what, when, where and how, and cannot be answered with a straight yes or not.

Example: "When did you get into writing?" "what made you decide on this particular area of writing"? etc.

This type of questioning sets the framework of the interview and is a useful tool when digging for significant information. (also you will have plenty of useable material at the end of the interview).

Write up the information within hours of the interview if possible or at least within a day or so.

As a courtesy, offer to send the person you have just interviewed a copy of your article (send them a press clipping) or to send them a free copy of your finished ebook.

NOTE: The person being interviewed does not get any payment for doing an interview.

RESOURCE BOX

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