

The process goes beyond mechanical Q & A

Tips for interacting during an interview

- Make eye contact and give the subject your full attention..
- Be interested in what the subject has to say but don't interject your opinions.
- Consider a pause a time for reflection. Many subjects will fill up the dead air by giving you more information.
- Change your questions or the order of them if the subject begins giving you good information.
- If the subject strays off topic too much, ask the person a relevant question to get him or her on track again.
- If the subject seems to avoid answering a question, rephrase it. Or say, "Perhaps you didn't understand what I was asking." Then pose the question again or in another way.
- Take plenty of good notes quickly and ask the subject to repeat an idea if necessary.
- Ask the subject for other possible sources. A subject will often know who has a different perspective so you can get another side.
- Ask to see things connected with the story. A student who spent a semester as a foreign exchange student may have a photo album he or she is willing to share with you. The album may jog or prompt memories and details. It may also provide the yearbook with good photos.

Tips for recognizing a good quote

- Words that are more descriptive than the ones that you as a writer would use.
"I'd walk in the front door, sit in my beanbag chair and listen to the only thing I could hear — the buzz of the lights. Living alone isn't a party every night."
- Words that say something usual in a unique way.
A usual quote from a story about a teacher facing cancer may be "I just take it one day at a time." Quote the subject when she says "If I can get up and I have enough energy to make myself some oatmeal and toast, then I consider that a good day."
- Words that say what the reader needs to hear from the subject word-for-word.
"I saw how we were loafing on our sprints in practice, and I knew that we'd get beat by 20 points Friday night," Coach Brendan Fitzgibbons said after the state playoff loss.
- Quote opinion, paraphrase fact.

Tips for ending the interview

- Ask the subject if he or she has anything else to add.
- Get the subject's phone number and say, "I'll probably be calling you later to ask you more questions. Is that okay?" or "When is a good time to catch you?" Saying this will eliminate the awkwardness a young reporter feels for having to reinterview.
- If a subject is nervous about the story and asks to see your notes, there are options to turning the notes over to the subject (which some publications see as an ethical problem).
Say: "Let me tell you what I have you saying." And then, either summarize the points of the interview or read the subject the quotes to double check their accuracy. Doing so will help to make sure you understand the story clearly and possibly ease the subject's fears.
Or "Well, what are you concerned about? The objective of my story is to_____." Letting the subject know the purpose of your story will often help the source to trust you as the reporter.
- Review your notes immediately and rewrite any notes that are illegible.