

Tips for Research and Interviewing

Conducting Research First

- Know the subject matter and know the source. You'll get farther in your interview if you ask intelligent and informed questions.
- Gather basic facts and background in your research beforehand. In the interview, you can get reactions and interpretations.
- Background research on your source: Personal, department-level, or college-level webpages; Facebook pages for students; CMU directory; publications your source has written; experiences from other who know your source.
- Background research on your topic: Previously published news articles, documents, or reports; press releases; public records; Internet searches; your own first-hand experiences.
- You can also use first interviews with minor players to prepare for your central source.
- Write down a list of questions to ask. Be comfortable with them before you go to the interview.

Questions

- Prefer neutral phrasing; watch out for biased or leading questions!
- Use closed-ended questions to get or confirm facts: "Who," "what," "when," "where," "is."
- Use open-ended questions to get opinions, reactions, and analysis: "Why," "how," "what do you think," "could," "if," "what about."
- Don't just make a statement and expect a response.
- Never ask "Can I get a quote?"

Interviewing

- Dress appropriately.
- Identify yourself as a reporter and state the purpose of the interview.
- Warm up by confirming the basics: first and last name as the source would like it to appear in the paper, exact job title, etc.
- Be aware of how things are going! Re-order your questions or pursue new avenues that appear promising as you go along, but gently rein in an unhelpful digression with a new question.
- Ask follow-up questions when appropriate.
- You must obtain permission from your source before using any sort of recording device.
- Even with a recording device, take good notes.
- Get important direct quotes of full sentences; a few words here and there will not be enough to write a story. It's OK if you pause for a moment to make sure you record something accurately.
- You may note down (and use) objective information about non-verbal communication and the environment.

After Interviewing

- Organize, re-type, or transcribe your notes as soon as possible. Save them!
- Contact the source to correct, double-check, or clarify anything you are unsure of.
- Never send a copy of your story to any source before publication! You may only send specific quotes or facts to be checked for accuracy.