



Successful Interviews

A stakeholder, decision maker, or subject-matter expert can help you discover information about your issue that you won't be able to find through print or online research. In order to get information from these sources, you will need to request and conduct an interview. The interview may be conducted via email, phone, or in person. But remember, if the interview will be conducted in person, you will need your teacher or a parent to accompany you to the interview. Below are some tips to help you obtain a successful interview.

Requesting an Interview

Consider how you will contact the person to be interviewed (e-mail, phone, in person).

- Be polite and professional.
- State the issue you are addressing and provide a brief summary of the reason(s) you are requesting an interview with the source.
- Schedule the date, time, duration, and location.
- Ask permission to make a video or audio recording of the interview, if applicable.
- Ask permission to take photos at the interview, if applicable.

Interview Questions

Make sure you ask the right kinds of questions to get the information you need.

- Closed Questions
 - Often ask for factual information.
 - Help build knowledge.
 - Easy and quick to answer.
 - Can generally be answered with either a single word or a short phrase (Yes/No, cold, etc.)
 - Keep control of the conversation with the questioner.
- Open Questions
 - Generally begin with Why or How.
 - Require an explanation (Because, I think, I feel, etc.)
 - Ask for thoughts or reflections.
 - Ask for opinions or feelings.
 - Cede control of the conversation to the respondent.



Instead of asking a question, you might begin with, “Tell me about . . .” For example, you may ask the source to tell you about her/his relationship with another stakeholder, rather than asking the source if s/he gets along with that person.

You might also ask the source for suggestions of questions s/he thinks need to be asked or answered to better understand the issue and the impacts of your action plan.

Before the Interview

- Research your topic thoroughly.
- Research the source (background, position, previously published views).
- Create a clean copy of your questions in advance of the interview. Leave room to write notes and to write responses to follow-up questions.
- Consider sending the source a list of topics you will be covering in the interview so that s/he can be well prepared.

During the Interview

- Be polite, professional, and dress appropriately.
- With permission, set up any recording devices.
- Make eye contact, stay engaged.
- Be an active listener.
- Stay neutral and non-argumentative.
- Try not to appear critical of the source’s responses or swayed by her/his opinions.
- Seize the opportunity to ask spontaneous, follow-up questions that weren’t on your list.
- Allow the source to stray off topic if it could help you gather valuable information.
- Thank the source for her/his time.

After the Interview

- Immediately review your notes and fill in any missing information while the interview is fresh in your mind.
- Note any further research or action items you need to complete.
- Send a thank-you email or note to the source.