

Interview Suggestions

1. Learn all you can about the subject and the particular area you are researching, i.e. emergency worker, first responder, survivor, etc.
2. Conduct a pre-interview to gather biographical information about the person to be interviewed, establish rapport with that person and identify interview topics.
3. Based on the pre-interview and your research, develop questions and a sequence for asking these questions.
4. Select a comfortable location for the person being interviewed.
5. The interviewer should arrive on time and introduce himself/herself and state why the interview is being conducted.
6. The interviewer should set up a tape recorder (with the permission of the interviewee) so that both parties can be recorded.
7. Ask the interviewee if he/she is ready to begin and, if yes, start the interview.
8. State the name of the person being interviewed, the name of the person conducting the interview, the topic, the place, date and time of the interview first.
9. Begin the interview with a few simple, open-ended questions that the person being interviewed can answer easily and that will put him at ease.
10. Ask many open-ended questions so that the person will find it easier to tell his story rather than give brief yes or no answers.
11. Speak clearly so that the narrator can hear and understand you easily.
12. Do not rush the narrator. Silence can be productive. Time to think will give the narrator a chance to recall incidents and details. Try to pause at least 10 seconds before asking the next question after an answer.
13. Be well-prepared but do not limit the interview to the prepared questions. Engage in active listening.
 - Always listen to the narrator's response and ask a follow-up question if it will provide more information.
 - If a thought shared is a sad or painful memory respond by pausing for a moment. Out of sensitivity give recognition to the story just shared before moving on to the next question.
 - Always ask follow-up questions when the information given mentions a significant event to bring out more detail and description.
14. Feel free to ask challenging questions.
15. Never challenge or correct a narrator. They are recounting their memories as best as they can.
16. Props such as pictures, scrapbooks, newspaper clippings, maps, etc can be used during the interview to jog the narrator's memory and bring out more stories and details.
17. Have a good closing question to summarize or end the interview.
18. Always thank the person you interviewed for his/her time and for sharing his/her memories and experiences.
19. Have the narrator sign and date a prepared interview release form that gives the person who conducted the interview permission to use the information for educational purposes.
20. Write a personal thank-you note to the narrator. Mail it within a week of the interview.

Adapted from:

Ferguson, Cynthia, Melissa J. Greenwald and Randall M. Miller. "Some Characteristics of a Good Interview." Is There A Dream for Today? Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall Hunt Publishing Company, 1998. pp. 296-98, 304.

Taken from 9/11 Memorial and Museum website