THE INTERVIEW

QUESTIONS

- Try to develop one good lead question to open things up.
- Include background info that must be collected.
- Develop listening curiosity.
- Jot new questions as they occur during interview.

INTERVIEW

Attitude

- Be friendly--"I am glad to be spending this time with you."
- Be authoritative, not hesitant. By agreeing to do interview, person gives you the right to ask questions. However, he/she retains right to decline to answer.
- Be quiet--listen rather than trying to impress the subject with your knowledge.
- Get info in their words. Pause after answers to give subject chance to elaborate. Sometimes the best follow-up question is no question.
- Be responsive, make eye contact, nod, smile--show that you are awake and listening!
- Be polite. If the subject starts to ramble, listen. When they pause, then you can change the subject.

Focus on answers, not questions:
Let answer lead naturally to next question rather than worrying about what else you want to ask. (Example--conversations). You can refer to your list of questions at a break or pause to get conversation going again.

At end, take a minute to briefly review your questions to ensure you got needed background info, or remembered to ask crucial questions.

Take notes on observations as well as information.

NOTES

Don't focus so hard on taking notes that you miss answers, cues. Notes are to jog your memory later. This is not an essay test!

Use abbreviations, shorthand, and quick phrases rather than full sentences.

Quotes--Anything you might want to quote, take more careful notes (You can leave out obvious words like "the"). Put them in "marks" so you remember that it is a quote. If having trouble getting it down accurately, ask him/her to hold up for a minute, and read back the words. No one wants to be misquoted.
Soon after the interview, review notes to ensure you can read them!

Rewrite, add, and clarify while the interview is fresh in your mind.

Put notes away. Let sense of the interview stew around in the back of your mind until it gels. Find the focus:

- Use "tell a friend" method.
- Explain the story in one sentence.
- Write a headline.
- Find your lead. Find the lead by asking yourself, “What was the most interesting?” With a focus and a good lead, the rest will flow naturally.

Write the first draft without referring to notes! Then, look over notes to see what ideas, info, etc., are missing that you might want to include.

You do not have to use everything.

Write "fix later" or mark with an asterisk parts that need work--don't get hung up on making it perfect the first time through, or you will get laryngitis (lose the voice, or flow!)

If you have info from another source, identify it.

Read finished draft out loud--you will hear the rough parts that hide when you read it.

Check accuracy of facts before rewriting.

Envision your article as a story with a plot: beginning, middle, end. Your subject is a character in that story. Make your reader see, hear, and care about that subject/character.

Linda Lyman, the Penn Franklin, Murrysville, Pennsylvania