

INTERVIEWING

To write the story everyone wants to read, you must conduct thorough interviews with the right people in the right place..

FOCUS ON PEOPLE, EMOTION AND MEANINGFUL STORY-TELLING

LONG BEFORE THE FIRST INTERVIEW

Conduct research. This is absolutely key prior to conducting any kind of interview. If you fail to do this, you are making your job much harder than it should be.

The idea is to gather as much information about the subject as possible before conducting the interview. This will demonstrate not only a general understanding of the subject matter, but also that you care about the subject.

Two main research steps: Review and Survey

Review previous yearbook and newspaper stories about the subject matter. Then decide if you need to locate statistics, such as the school district budget, salaries of public officials (city, state, federal or public school employees), sports teams, debate teams, band member awards, attendance figures, etc.

Survey those close to the subject of your story and probe for new and interesting information by seeking them out and having a simple conversation

Ask: What story needs to be told this year? What else?
Who should I talk to about that? Who else?
What struggles exist right now? Accomplishments?

The answers to those questions give you a direction your story might take and most importantly tells you who to interview.

PREPARE FOR THE INTERVIEW

After researching the subject, compile a list of questions you want to ask the source. These questions are used primarily if you get stuck. The majority of your questions should come from the natural flow of the conversation.

Be sure to talk with an editor or peer about your subject prior to the interview as they may have some different perspectives or questions you hadn't thought of.

Above all else, be interested and curious. Ask questions that interest you. If you're bored now, imagine how bored your reader will be.

A few questions for almost any interview:

Tell me about a time when you struggled?
Tell me about... (this lead in works for almost anything)
What do you want readers to know about
How do you feel when you think about.....

Make sure you have what you need:

Notes from your research
Questions you compiled
Paper/Pen
Recording device such as your phone or other audio device

Once you're prepared, you'll need to contact the source

CONTACT YOUR SOURCE

Call, text, email or speak to the source and ask to schedule approximately 15-30 minutes for an interview for yearbook.

Conduct all interviews in person or on the phone. Not over text.

Allow the source to choose the venue so they are comfortable.

INTERVIEW YOUR SOURCE

The interview will fall flat if you and/or your source are nervous.

Start with a few easy questions like:

Do you still have about 30 minutes?
Could you spell your first and last name for me?
Do you mind if I record our conversation so I quote you properly?

Remember: This is first and foremost a conversation. Be genuine, take notes, but make eye contact as well.

Don't rely 100% on recording the interview. When you hear something quote-worthy, write it down. Always verify quotes by reading it back to the source. This is to verify only, not necessarily an opportunity for them to change the quote.

The most exciting parts of your story will not be words you wrote, but instead, words you quote.

The last two questions you should always ask:

What else should I know? / Is there anything else?
May I contact you again if I have more questions?

VERIFY AND MEET WITH OTHER SOURCES

Try and interview three people for each story you write. When you meet with these new sources you are looking to verify information from the other sources, obtain differing perspectives and discover new information.

You must check on facts, statistics, time-lines and other information given to you by your sources.

Facts are not quotes they are facts which can be verified so they don't belong in quotes.

PROOF THE INTERVIEW IS THE DIFFERENCE

Which of these two stories would you have rather written? Which one would you read? It's obvious which writer interviewed the source as opposed to "getting a quote" from someone.

Art students do pottery, drawing and painting.

"I took art because I like to draw," art student Alexis Hernandez revealed.

Some students think art is fun.

"I think art is fun," Alexis added.

Here is the same story where the writer obviously conducted an in-person interview

Alexis Hernandez tucked the unruly wisp of hair back into place with her mud-caked hands. She had battled with her bangs for the last 30 minutes as her bowl took shape on the pottery wheel.

"Anybody got like a clippie?" Alexis said to no one in particular in her Art I class third period. Her feet kept the wheel in a steady rotation with alternating tapping as the bowl became rounder and rounder.

"My grandmama will love this bowl," Alexis said. "It has to be like absolutely awesome."