**Eleven Hints for Effective Interviews (condensed from Joe Bunting’s blog)**

[](http://www.flickr.com/photos/29890539@N07/4648496819/)You want to have a conversation, not an interrogation. A good interviewer makes their interviewee comfortable. Going back to your list of questions all the time can rattle the person you’re interviewing. It also limits your story’s potential.

Your ability to be present, to keep your nose out of your notebook, will make your interviews shine with life.

To be more present, I always write out about a dozen questions before going into a face-to-face or phone interview. Your questions are your battle plans. You might not use them, but they prepare your mind for the task ahead.

**1. Ask about the person’s actions.**

It depends on the person, but usually I ask them about their specific [habits and practices](http://goinswriter.com/leo-babauta-interview/). If you can get people to describe their actions rather than their beliefs about themselves, you’ll see a clearer picture of them, one unmarred by slogans.

**2. Ask “forward” questions.**

The “What’s the best part of the next thing you’re doing?” question will engage your subject’s current, forward-looking energy. You get a more excited interviewee who wants to tell you what she or he is into.

**3. Ask open-ended questions.**

Try to ask open-ended questions that can’t be answered with a simple yes or no. Instead of asking if the team played well together, ask the person to describe how this team came together this season. To get them talking, just write the word “HOW” in bold letters at the top of your list of questions. Every time you look at it, ask, “How?” How do you do that? How do you feel about that? How did it go?

**4. Ask clarifying questions.**

If you’re honestly confused, don’t move along to the next question. Ask for clarification, even if you think you sound stupid. You know you aren’t. You don’t want to start writing your article and then realize you don’t know what you’re talking about because you were confused during the interview. It also strokes people’s egos when you tell them they’re the expert and you want to learn from them.

**5. Ask pointed questions and light-hearted questions.**

Try to mix up the tone of your questions. Dig in with direct questions. Reword it if your interviewee seems confused or evasive. Also, throw in the occasional light-hearted question for fun to show the very real, human side of your interviewee.

**6. Ask short questions and then follow up.**

Don’t try to pack all your questions into one super-mega question. Instead of asking a long-winded question, split it up into two parts. Follow-up questions can be key.

7. **Create a procedure for every interview.**

When someone agrees to an interview:

* Send him or her a confirmation e-mail immediately;
* Include your questions;
* Tell him or her when the interview will print;
* Give your guest a deadline to return written interview answers; and
* If you’re going to be doing an in-person or phone interview, confirm a time and date.
* Don’t be afraid to follow up if you do not hear back from someone within 2 days.

**8. Make your subject comfortable.**

The best interviews often come when the subject being interviewed is more at ease. A nervous/tense subject usually gives terse, bland, boring, “vanilla” answers. Chatting like a normal human is a good way to make them comfortable. Listen more than you speak. But at the same time, don’t be so quiet that they’re not comfortable.

**9. Research your subject beforehand.**

Read up on the person you’re talking to. Refer to facts you know about them, but let them speak for themselves.

Know your subject. Some people you interview might not be the most book-learned people. Asking intricate, long-winded questions in these instances is not advisable. Do some background research on your subject beforehand.

**10. This is an obvious one, but…**

If you’re doing your interview in person or on the phone, tape it. You’ll have a lot more actual quotes to use if you let a machine capture them instead of trying to do it all in notes. However, always ask for permission first.

**11. At the end of your interview…**

At the end of every interview, always ask, “Is there anything I didn’t ask that you’d like viewers/readers to know?” That single question has generated more golden quotes than any other. Always thank the person for their time and willingness to speak with you. Let the person know when or if he/she will hear back from you.

**Journalism I Task** - Students will work in small groups to create a list of 20+ appropriate, newsworthy questions which they believe would be effective interview questions for any one of the following people at Landstown:  Dr. Matney, Mr. Siock, Mrs. Bluestein, one of the assistant principals, or one of the security assistants.  Each group will turn in one paper with all contributing names listed.