

Interviewing techniques

using strategies to prepare and conduct interviews

- Objectives:**
- understand what is required for an effective interview;
 - learn strategies to help prepare for and conduct an interview;
 - appreciate the value of interviewing as an information gathering technique.

Use the following activities to introduce the featured research strategy

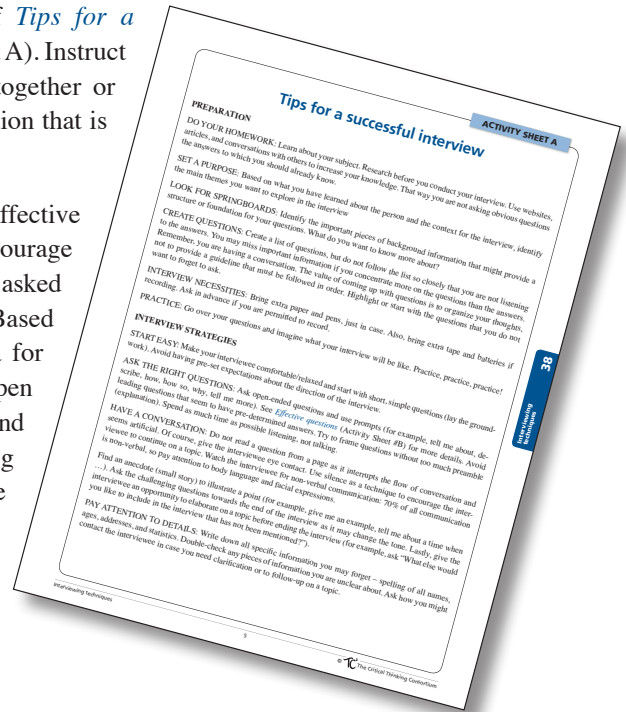
- Present students with the following situation:

“Think of a person, current or historical, you would like to know more about. Imagine you have been invited to meet this person. What questions would you ask?”

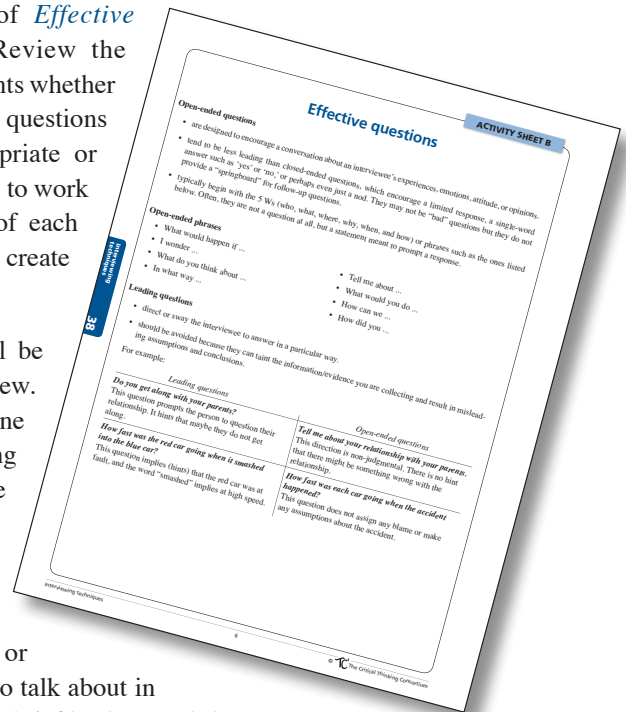
Provide time for students to write their questions. Invite students to share their ideas with a partner. Ask a few students to share their ideas with the class.

- Write the word “interview” on the board. Ask students if simply meeting a person, such as in their imagined situation, would be considered an interview. Invite students to identify the similarities and differences between an interview and a conversation. Discuss with students other ways they could find out about this person (e.g., reading about them or watching a documentary). Point out to students that people are sources of information and an interview is a way to gather detailed or revealing information.
- Explain to students that in this lesson they will learn techniques for using an interview as a method of gathering information. Discuss with students what makes an interview unique compared to other sources of research information. Inform students about the responsive nature of an interview. Point out that an interview enables a researcher to dig deeper by asking additional questions.
- Invite students to brainstorm the qualities of an effective interview. Provide examples of effective interviews from one of the following websites:
 - <http://www.cbc.ca/mansbridge/> (interviews conducted by Peter Mansbridge)
 - <http://www.cbc.ca/archives/> (search for Peter Gzowski interviews)
 - <http://www.cbc.ca/strombo/tv/episodes.html>
- After students have listened to several interviews, invite them to select one they thought was particularly effective and listen to it again. Instruct students to keep a tally of how many questions build on answers already given and how many questions were “fresh” or pre-planned. Discuss with students what makes these interviews effective. Based on the discussion, develop criteria for an effective interviewer (e.g., asks engaging questions, is attentive, has genuine interest, is responsive, has background information). For further information, refer to *Responsive questioning* (Lesson #51), available to subscribers to the **Tools for Thought** collection online and in print in *The Competencies Toolkit*.

- Provide students with a copy of *Tips for a successful interview* (Activity Sheet A). Instruct students to read the information together or individually and highlight information that is new to them.
- Pose the question, “What does an effective interview question look like?” Encourage students to think about the questions asked in the previously viewed videos. Based on the discussion, develop criteria for effective interview questions (e.g., open ended, build on interesting background information, draw out interesting ideas and information, cover a range of relevant topics).



- Provide students with a copy of *Effective questions* (Activity Sheet B). Review the information provided and ask students whether the criteria for effective interview questions they developed earlier are appropriate or need to be amended. Invite students to work in partners to identify the flaws of each question and then revise them to create effective questions.
- Explain to students their task will be to prepare and conduct an interview. They will be interviewing someone in the class in preparation for writing a profile about this student for the “Know your neighbour” section of the school website.
- Invite each student to identify personal characteristics, talents, or other information they would like to talk about in their interview. Ask them to create a brief background sheet to assist the interviewer in planning.



Practise the strategy

- Organize students in pairs and have them exchange information sheets. Provide them with a copy of *Planning an interview* (Activity Sheet C). As a class, review the purpose of the interview. Instruct students to record information they know about the interviewee. Guide students in identifying the background knowledge that might serve as a starting point or “springboard” for interview questions.
- Review the criteria for effective questions. Invite students to generate questions and then review the questions, selecting the most effective for the interview.
- Explain to students that they will actually be conducting the interview. Arrange for the students to interview each other. Discuss, and perhaps model, the importance of setting a comfortable tone for the interview, thanking the interviewee.
- When students have completed the interview, invite them to self- and peer-assess their interview using the rubric provided. Discuss what students have learned about the advantages and disadvantages of using interviews to gather information.

Planning an interview ACTIVITY SHEET C

Interviewer: _____
Interviewee: _____

Information I know about the interviewee: _____
Purpose of the interview: _____

Criteria for effective questions:

- no open ended,
- build on background information.

Possible questions

- draw out interesting ideas and information,
- cover a range of relevant topics.

Interviewing techniques © The Critical Thinking Consortium

Reinforce the strategy

- Introduce the Student Resource, *Interviewing techniques*. Review each of the elements: the purpose, strategies, practice sample, and self-assessment rubric.
- Discuss with students when this strategy might be useful both in and out of school.
- Invite students to brainstorm historic figures or interesting people they have learned about in different areas of the curriculum (e.g., mathematicians, scientists, explorers, politicians, musicians). Instruct students to select one person of particular interest to them. Explain to students that they are going to assume the role of that person and be interviewed by another student.
- Instruct students to find out as much as they can about their character so they can assume this role. All students will develop a role.

Interviewing techniques STUDENT RESOURCE

using strategies to prepare and conduct interviews

Purpose

This strategy helps me get useful information from a primary source by conducting an effective interview.

Instructions

Preparation

- Prepare background information. Review what you know about the interviewee and/or the topic of the interview. Research so the sure you have adequate background information.
- Clarify your purpose. In general terms, identify what you are hoping to get out of your interview. Think of the main themes or topics you want to cover during the interview.
- Look for “springboards”. Identify the important pieces of background information that might provide a structure or foundation for your questions. What do you want to know more about?
- Create questions. Create interview questions that meet the following criteria: open ended, build on learning background information, draw out ideas and new information, and use the SWs.
- Decide how you will record responses. Decide whether you will record the interview or take notes during the interview.

Implementation

- Establish a relaxed environment. Greet the interviewee and create a context for what you will talk about.
- Make sure you have a record. Keep clear notes of important points or come that the recording device is working.
- Be attentive and respectful. Listen carefully to the answers given and try to ask questions that build on what the interviewee says.
- Acknowledge the interviewee. Thank the interviewee for agreeing to speak with you.

For a sample use of the strategy, see the page after next.

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- Apply the strategy in everyday teaching**
- Organize students in pairs and instruct them to share the key points of their research. Provide them with a copy of *Planning an interview* (Activity Sheet C), to plan an interview with the selected character.
 - Instruct students to provide the interviewee with a copy of the interview questions to allow the interviewee to prepare interesting answers. Explain to students that if they are asked a question they are unable to answer they should make up a reasonable response, consistent with what they know about the character.
 - At appropriate times over the ensuing several weeks, encourage students to use this strategy in regular classroom situations, including the following:
 - In preparation for a guest speaker
 - Interviewing family members
 - Interviewing community leaders
 - Interviewing peers on relevant topics
- Assess use of the strategy**
- Encourage students to refer to the rubric found in *Interviewing techniques* (Student Resource) when self-assessing their use of this literacy strategy.
 - Allow students to practise the strategy two or three times without evaluation.
 - Guide students in interpreting and using the rubric to evaluate their own use of the strategy.
 - Encourage students to use the rubric whenever they use the strategy.
 - To use the rubric for teacher evaluation of student work, remove the first person (student) reference from each descriptor.

Tips for a successful interview

PREPARATION

DO YOUR HOMEWORK: Learn about your subject. Research before you conduct your interview. Use websites, articles, and conversations with others to increase your knowledge. That way you are not asking obvious questions the answers to which you should already know.

SET A PURPOSE: Based on what you have learned about the person and the context for the interview, identify the main themes you want to explore in the interview

LOOK FOR SPRINGBOARDS: Identify the important pieces of background information that might provide a structure or foundation for your questions. What do you want to know more about?

CREATE QUESTIONS: Create a list of questions, but do not follow the list so closely that you are not listening to the answers. You may miss important information if you concentrate more on the questions than the answers. Remember, you are having a conversation. The value of coming up with questions is to organize your thoughts, not to provide a guideline that must be followed in order. Highlight or start with the questions that you do not want to forget to ask.

INTERVIEW NECESSITIES: Bring extra paper and pens, just in case. Also, bring extra tape and batteries if recording. Ask in advance if you are permitted to record.

PRACTICE: Go over your questions and imagine what your interview will be like. Practice, practice, practice!

INTERVIEW STRATEGIES

START EASY: Make your interviewee comfortable/relaxed and start with short, simple questions (lay the groundwork). Avoid having pre-set expectations about the direction of the interview.

ASK THE RIGHT QUESTIONS: Ask open-ended questions and use prompts (for example, tell me about, describe, how, how so, why, tell me more). See *Effective questions* (Activity Sheet B) for more details. Avoid leading questions that seem to have pre-determined answers. Try to frame questions without too much preamble (explanation). Spend as much time as possible listening, not talking.

HAVE A CONVERSATION: Do not read a question from a page as it interrupts the flow of conversation and seems artificial. Of course, give the interviewee eye contact. Use silence as a technique to encourage the interviewee to continue on a topic. Watch the interviewee for non-verbal communication: 70% of all communication is non-verbal, so pay attention to body language and facial expressions.

Find an anecdote (small story) to illustrate a point (for example, give me an example, tell me about a time when ...). Ask the challenging questions towards the end of the interview as it may change the tone. Lastly, give the interviewee an opportunity to elaborate on a topic before ending the interview (for example, ask “What else would you like to include in the interview that has not been mentioned?”).

PAY ATTENTION TO DETAILS: Write down all specific information you may forget – spelling of all names, ages, addresses, and statistics. Double-check any pieces of information you are unclear about. Ask how you might contact the interviewee in case you need clarification or to follow-up on a topic.

Effective questions

Open-ended questions

- are designed to encourage a conversation about an interviewee's experiences, emotions, attitude, or opinions.
- tend to be less leading than closed-ended questions, which encourage a limited response, a single-word answer such as 'yes' or 'no,' or perhaps even just a nod. They may not be "bad" questions but they do not provide a "springboard" for follow-up questions.
- typically begin with the 5 Ws (who, what, where, why, when, and how) or phrases such as the ones listed below. Often, they are not a question at all, but a statement meant to prompt a response.

Open-ended phrases

- What would happen if ...
- I wonder ...
- What do you think about ...
- In what way ...
- Tell me about ...
- What would you do ...
- How can we ...
- How did you ...

Leading questions

- direct or sway the interviewee to answer in a particular way.
- should be avoided because they can taint the information/evidence you are collecting and result in misleading assumptions and conclusions.

For example:

<i>Leading questions</i>	<i>Open-ended questions</i>
<p><i>Do you get along with your parents?</i> This question prompts the person to question their relationship. It hints that maybe they do not get along.</p>	<p><i>Tell me about your relationship with your parents.</i> This direction is non-judgmental. There is no hint that there might be something wrong with the relationship.</p>
<p><i>How fast was the red car going when it smashed into the blue car?</i> This question implies (hints) that the red car was at fault, and the word "smashed" implies at high speed.</p>	<p><i>How fast was each car going when the accident happened?</i> This question does not assign any blame or make any assumptions about the accident.</p>

Name: _____

Identify whether the question is ineffective because it is closed, leading, or both. Then, turn it into an effective question.

Ineffective questions	Flaws	Improved questions
Did you take the boy's toy?	<input type="checkbox"/> closed <input type="checkbox"/> leading <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> closed and leading	Why is the boy crying? Tell me what happened.
Did you make this mess?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> closed <input type="checkbox"/> leading <input type="checkbox"/> closed and leading	What can you tell me about this pile of toys?
1. Why did you offend the Prime Minister?	<input type="checkbox"/> closed <input type="checkbox"/> leading <input type="checkbox"/> closed and leading	
2. Do you like golf?	<input type="checkbox"/> closed <input type="checkbox"/> leading <input type="checkbox"/> closed and leading	
3. Can you give me an example?	<input type="checkbox"/> closed <input type="checkbox"/> leading <input type="checkbox"/> closed and leading	
4. Would you tell me more about ... (a topic)?	<input type="checkbox"/> closed <input type="checkbox"/> leading <input type="checkbox"/> closed and leading	
5. Who inspires you?	<input type="checkbox"/> closed <input type="checkbox"/> leading <input type="checkbox"/> closed and leading	
6. Could you be more specific?	<input type="checkbox"/> closed <input type="checkbox"/> leading <input type="checkbox"/> closed and leading	
7. Have you ever been discriminated against?	<input type="checkbox"/> closed <input type="checkbox"/> leading <input type="checkbox"/> closed and leading	
8. Is Canada a country where everyone is welcomed?	<input type="checkbox"/> closed <input type="checkbox"/> leading <input type="checkbox"/> closed and leading	
9. Are you proud to be a Canadian?	<input type="checkbox"/> closed <input type="checkbox"/> leading <input type="checkbox"/> closed and leading	

Source: Adapted from <http://www.mediacollege.com/journalism/interviews/open-ended-questions.html>.

Planning an interview

Interviewer:

Purpose of the interview:

Interviewee:

Information I know about the interviewee:

Possible questions

Criteria for effective questions:

- are open ended,
- build on background information,

- draw out interesting ideas and information,
- cover a range of relevant topics.

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Instructions

Preparation

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- **Clarify your purpose:** In general terms, identify what you are hoping to get out of your interview. Think of the main themes or topics you want to cover during the interview.
- **Look for “springboards”:** Identify the important pieces of background information that might provide a structure or foundation for your questions. What do you want to know more about?
- **Create questions:** Create interview questions that meet the following criteria: open ended, build on interesting background information, draw out ideas and new information, and use the 5Ws.
- **Decide how you will record responses:** Decide whether you will record the interview or take notes during the interview.

Implementation

- **Establish a relaxed environment:** Greet the interviewee and create a context for what you will talk about.
- **Make sure you have a record:** Keep clear notes of important points or ensure that the recording device is working.
- **Be attentive and responsive:** Listen carefully to the answers given and try to ask questions that build on what the interviewee says.
- **Acknowledge the interviewee:** Thank the interviewee for agreeing to speak with you.

How well do I apply the strategy?

Assessing my ability to “prepare and conduct interviews”

Accomplished

Good

Basic

Struggling

Prepare for an effective interview:

Before the interview, I prepared many interesting, open-ended, and engaging questions to build on what I had already found out about the person.

Before the interview, I prepared a few interesting, open-ended questions to build on what I had already found out about the person.

Before the interview, I prepared a few interesting questions some of which were open ended and added to what little I knew about the person.

I struggled to prepare open-ended, interesting questions.

Conduct an effective interview:

During the interview, I listened carefully to the interviewee and probed effectively with follow-up questions based on what the person said.

During the interview, I listened to the interviewee and asked a few relevant, follow-up questions based on what the person said.

During the interview, I listened to the interviewee most of the time and was more comfortable staying with the questions I prepared.

I struggled to listen and ask any relevant follow-up questions.

SAMPLE

use of the strategy

Planning an interview**Interviewer:** Jason**Interviewee:** Renaud**Purpose of the interview:** *to create an interesting profile of this person for the school website—what he likes and dislikes and any interesting opinions and experiences***Information I know about the interviewee:**

- moved here from Haiti
- takes the bus to school
- speaks French
- plays soccer
- has two brothers
- likes Reggae music
- plays a drum
- wants to be a pilot
- gets good grades
- still has family in Haiti
- works at McDonald's on the weekend

Possible questions**Criteria for effective questions:**

- are open ended,
- build on background information,
- draw out interesting ideas and information,
- cover a range of relevant topics.

*Why did your family move to Canada?**What has been the most difficult adjustment to living in Canada? What have you liked the best?**What do you like best about our school?**How did you become a drummer?**Who is the person you admire the most and why?*