

PLANNING INTERVIEWS



AN IN-DEPTH GUIDE TO PLANNING EFFECTIVE INTERVIEWS

REPLAY™
**MEMORY
MAKERS**
SPORTING MEMORIES UNITING GENERATIONS

PROJECT INFORMATION SHEET

An in-depth guide to planning effective interviews

Everyone involved in recordings – teachers, interviewers and participants – should have a clear and full understanding of the purpose of the process. They should also be clear on what will happen to the recordings.

When contacting people to ask if they will share their experiences, it can be useful to follow up the discussion with a printed Project Information Sheet or email attachment.

This would summarize:

- **The purpose, focus and process of the project**
- **Who will conduct the interviews**
- **The equipment used to record the interview**
- **What will happen to the recordings and where they will be stored**

This Project Information Sheet should also inform people that they will be asked to sign a copyright agreement form and include contact details of the contributor. A signed copy should be held by both parties.

INTERVIEW SET UP

The ideal location would be a quiet room, separate from other interviews or activities.

This may not always be possible, but try to arrange each interview group so they are as far away from other noise sources as the confines and circumstances will allow.

Other impediments to a good recording include:

- **Open windows allowing noise in**
- **Central heating noise**
- **Loud clocks**
- **People bursting into the room**

Take a few moments to listen and eradicate background noise where feasible. It's also a good idea to put a notice on the outside of the door to say recordings are taking place.

Rather than group interviews, it would be best to concentrate on interviewing one person at a time – but it's worth considering how many students should be involved with one contributor.

One-to-one is the ratio that will create the closest of interview situations and foster rapport between the two people. However, young students may benefit from at least one other for support, encouraging group-work – and the interview itself sometimes benefits from multi-questioners. There is also a risk assessment factor in the one-to-one situation.

Things to bear in mind:

- **Tables can often create barriers so it is best if chairs can be arranged in a semi-circular fashion with the interviewers not too far from the contributor**
- **If recording on video, what is behind the contributor is significant, but the most important aspect is to have any light source opposite the person and not behind.**



RECORDING SOUND:

TECHNICAL CONSIDERATIONS

While the common image of an interview situation usually involves one person holding a microphone for the other person to talk into, this can become impractical for longer interviews.

Holding even a lightweight piece of equipment becomes uncomfortable after a few minutes – plus any movement or bumping can interfere with the recording. Mounting microphones and video cameras on tripods overcomes these problems – and small tabletop models are available.

A chair can be used to site a microphone tripod close to (and to the side of) the contributor.

If a video camera or iPad is the recording video, a tie clip microphone is useful. It allows the camera to be positioned well back from the subjects and the technician student can concentrate on framing, focus and exposure. Even a very cheap tie clip microphone can produce good results with this set up.

It is good to thread the wire of this mic under your jumper or jacket and clip it about 10cm from your face – but please be aware of fiddling with other people's clothing and ask them to position it themselves. Finally, make sure all the equipment is fully charged in advance.

On a practical level, it's often challenging for even an experienced, professional interviewer to make a good recording while concentrating on the questions, responses and all other aspects of the interview.

A good solution is to have one person responsible for the recording equipment and one or two others asking questions. Any more than three students might impair relationship building.

MARKING THE RECORDING

At the start of the interview it's useful to mark the recording – introducing all contributors, marking the date and location and confirming that consent is present and informed.

A printed card can be prepared beforehand to read from if necessary. Here's an example of how to do this:



“ Hello my name is xxxxxxxxxx and we're here at xxxxxxxx School on day, month, year interviewing Mr (name) about his memories of the Olympic Games in 1968.

Asking questions along with me will be (name) and (name).

Mr (name), can I just check with you that the purpose of the project has been fully explained to you, that you're happy for the recording to be uploaded to the Sporting Memories Network website and that you're ok to proceed? And can I ask what you would prefer us to call you? ”

THE INTERVIEW PROCESS:

STARTING OUT

Students will get a better result from interviews if they take some time beforehand to work on the following areas:

- **Planning and preparation of questions**
- **Research on the topic to be discussed**
- **Finding out a little about the contributor**

At one extreme, some interviews strictly adhere to the same pre-prepared questions for everyone. At the other, some sessions are a free flowing discussion with little structure.

Somewhere in between is where the interviewers should be aiming. Yes, questions can be prepared, but the more confident students become, the more they can prepare topics to explore rather than write down specific questions.

Whatever stage students are at, the use of supplementary questions is very useful – and these should be discussed and practised in advance. A little biographical information is helpful at the beginning of the interview: questions such as the ones here are a good way to start.



Can I ask you first of all (name), what your full name is? Any middle names?

What year were you born, if you don't mind me asking?

And where were you born? How long have you lived here in (place)?”



Students can then proceed to the topics in focus.

ASKING QUESTIONS

Most stories will have been shared before, and they usually have a well-defined beginning and end.

It's good practice to wait until the end of a narrative to ask any supplementary questions, rather than interrupting the story, but it's useful to have your next question ready in your head.

As well as open questions and the “what, when, where, who and how” questions, it's often useful to think of the five senses: you can use these to try and evoke feelings attached to them from the contributors as they think back.

BEING ENCOURAGING

Body language can be very important in the interview process and students can show interest and enthusiasm in the way they sit, their posture and eye contact.

A normal conversation would include a lot of vocables – noises such as “mm”, “aha”, and “hmm:” for example. While these are natural ways of showing interest and understanding, students should try to avoid them while interviewing – as they will obviously be recorded. Instead, they should practice eye contact and affirming head nods.

FINISHING THE INTERVIEW

While it may be rare with sporting topics, many people can become emotional and upset when recalling the past.

A few tears are normal and the contributor can be asked if they would like a short break or to move on to another area of conversation. Finishing the interview at this stage of high emotion would not be an appropriate way to end and it's important to finish positively. This is a worthwhile topic to discuss with students in advance.

When the interview is completed, common courtesies of thanks – and expressing interest – are important.

You may wish to offer a copy of the recording to the interviewee for himself or herself (or their family) once it has been processed.

If video recording, once the interviewee has left, it can be valuable to turn the camera on the questioners. They can then repeat their questions and record some reactions as well. This footage can be edited into a complete video and used as cutaways.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

In addition to interviewees' copyright, don't forget the students' or volunteers' contribution in terms of questioning. They also have copyright of their voices on the recordings – so it is good practice for them to be informed of this. It may be appropriate to have them (and their parents, if they are under sixteen) sign a waiver to that effect.

Guidelines on copyright, legalities and informed consent are available on the Oral History Society website.





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