INTERVIEWING

Reporters rarely turn to Supreme Court justices for reactions to events on a football field. But during her 2016 interview with Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Katie Couric asked the jurist about San Francisco '49ers quarterback Colin Kaepernick's refusal to stand during the national anthem as a protest against police killings of blacks. "I think it's dumb and disrespectful," Ginsburg said, while acknowledging Kaepernick and other athletes had a First Amendment right to express their beliefs.

"I talk with people and notice things, and then I turn those things into a column for the most wonderful gift a storyteller can be given—an audience on the other end."

Bob Greene, columnist

After Turing Pharmaceuticals acquired the drug Daraprim, which is used to treat patients with parasitic diseases and to prevent pneumonia in HIV/AIDS patients, company founder and then CEO Martin Shkreli raised the price of a pill from $13.50 to $750. The 5,000 percent increase angered many, but Shkreli responded: "To me the drug was woefully underpriced. It is not a question of 'Is this fair?' or 'What did you pay for it?' or 'When was it invented?' It should be more expensive in many ways."

Just six months into his presidency, Donald Trump undercut the position of Attorney General Jeff Sessions, who recused himself from decisions regarding the investigation into Russian involvement in the U.S. presidential election. "Sessions should have never recused himself, and if he was going to recuse himself, he should have told me before he took the job and I would have picked somebody else," the president said.

All three of these comments made news; some had an impact on government policies and national politics. Why did these three people say these things? Ginsburg later regretted her remark and apologized to Kaepernick, but neither Shkreli nor Trump backed down from their remarks, even though many found them shocking. Whatever the reason, the comments were made in response to questions asked by reporters. The Couric–Ginsburg interview appeared on Yahoo News. Shkreli was giving an interview to a Financial Times reporter, and Trump's remarks came in a 50-minute interview with reporters and editors for The New York Times.

Katie Couric (left) interviews Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg. Along with her question about the NFL players' protest, Couric covered various topics, including the judge's recently deceased colleague, Anthony Scalia, Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump and his travel ban on Muslims.

Interviewing—asking questions, getting answers and asking more questions—is a basic tool of the journalist. For the experienced investigative reporter as well as the fresh-from-college police reporter, interviewing provides much of the fact, background and color for any news story. When used properly, interviewing can be an effective method of gathering information.

Preparing for the Interview

No matter what kind of story a reporter writes, it usually will require at least one interview. Successful interviews do not just happen; they are the product of thought and planning. An interview's purpose determines the length and required preparation. Often interviews are short and focused on gathering a few specific pieces of information. A journalist may ask a legislator a few questions about a bill's objective or provisions. Another may question a police officer to get details about a recent crime. On other occasions, reporters may ask one or two specific questions of many people to gather an unscientific sampling of public opinion. Some reporters specialize in writing profiles of famous or interesting people. They usually conduct long interviews—sometimes stretching over several days—with the subjects of their stories.

Reporters preparing to interview a source should ask themselves, "Why am I conducting this interview? What kind of story will I write from this information?" The answers to these questions will determine what they ask, the sources they seek and their conduct during the interview. The reasons for interviewing are as varied as the resulting stories, but most often journalists are seeking information for one of three story types: the news story, the feature story or the investigative story (see Table 11.1).

Reporters who cover a news story, such as a crime or a city council action, usually interview several individuals to gather all the relevant information. They may seek just a few facts or a brief reaction from each individual. Collectively, however, the material allows them to construct a complete narrative of a newsworthy event or explanation of an important issue.

Reporters writing feature stories, such as personality profiles, must gather additional information that will provide the color and detail the audience needs to better understand a person or a situation. Investigative reporters must dig deeper still to uncover actions and motives that their subjects may prefer to keep hidden (see Chapter 18).

Many experienced interviewers think of an interview as a conversation, but it is a conversation with a specific purpose: gathering information for an unseen audience of readers, viewers or listeners. To accomplish that purpose, interviewers must control the conversation, and they can do that only if they have properly

TABLE 11.1 Information Reporters Seek, by Story Type

Information Reporters Seek	Stories in Which the Information Is Used		
	News	Feature	Investigative
Facts and details, including dates, names, locations and costs	✓	✓	✓
Chronology showing the unfolding of events	✓	✓	✓
Relationships among the people, organizations or issues involved	✓	✓	✓
Context and perspective, including the significance of events or issues and their relationships to other issues	✓	✓	✓
Anecdotes that illuminate events or issues and make them more dramatic and understandable for readers or viewers	✓	✓	✓
The environment in which the subject lives or works		✓	✓
How the subject appears and dresses		✓	✓
The subject's mannerisms		✓	✓
Smells, sounds and textures associated with the subject's home or work		✓	✓
The subject's version of events and how it differs from that of other sources and records			✓
Explanations of contradictions between the subject's version of events and that of other sources or of contradictions within a subject's version			✓
The subject's replies to all charges and allegations the reporter may have heard from other sources during an investigation			✓

prepared. In the case of in-depth personality interviews or investigative interviews, the planning process might be long and complicated, but even with simpler interviews, it can involve several steps.

Selecting Interview Sources

Once reporters know an interview's purpose, they decide whom to interview. For a personality profile, they will interview the subject and his or her friends, enemies and co-workers. But when the story is about an issue or event, they may have to determine who has the necessary information.

Reporters working on stories that will be published days or weeks later can try to interview everyone who might have relevant information. They can ask each subject for the names of people who might contribute information and repeat the process until the list of potential sources has been exhausted. Journalists working on deadline must find the best possible sources quickly. They want sources who possess knowledge, expertise or insight relevant to the story. The subjects

Journalists speak with doctors following a press conference about the mass shooting at the Pulse nightclub in Orlando, Florida. In this interviewing situation, reporters are able to question several sources in one venue, but they have little time with each subject.

should be able to explain complicated matters in a clear and interesting manner. Sometimes the best available source is a document or record rather than a person. Reporters can save themselves and their interviewees time and trouble if they begin by searching for documents or public records that provide the factual background for a story.

When choosing interview subjects, reporters should never let any organization, governmental or private, make its public relations person the scapegoat. Tony Kovaleski, an investigative reporter for KMGH-Channel 7 in Denver, said the job of the reporter is to hold accountable the real decision maker, not the PR person.

HOW MANY SOURCES ARE ENOUGH?

Beginning reporters sometimes wonder how many sources they need for a story. The answer depends on at least four factors: deadline pressure, the expertise of the sources, the degree of controversy raised by a topic and the complexity of a topic.

When stories involve breaking news, which readers, viewers and listeners need as soon as possible, reporters lack the time to search widely for sources and information. They must construct a story from the materials readily available. Still, they should get as complete an account of the event and include as many points of view as possible. If a journalist cannot interview a key source before the deadline, the story should say so clearly.

If sources possess broad expertise in a topic, three or four might be enough. If interviewees have more limited experience, reporters might need to speak to dozens. Academic and government economists, for instance, may have extensive knowledge about the economy of a city or region, while individual business owners may know what is happening only in their particular business.

The degree of controversy also affects the number of sources. If a topic is not controversial—the cause of polio, for example—one source may be sufficient. If the topic is the likelihood of developing cures for diabetes or Alzheimer's disease from fetal stem cells, about which experts disagree, a reporter must include all reasonable points of view in the story.

Finally, the more complex the story, the more sources the reporter will need. A story about a particular crime committed by a particular teenager may need only a few sources. A story about the causes of teenage crime in general would require talking to dozens of sources from such fields as law enforcement, criminology, psychology and social work.

However many sources reporters talk to, they must evaluate each one by asking, "What is the basis of the source's knowledge?" "How credible or reliable is the source?" When a subject makes an assertion, ask him or her, "How do you know that?" Determining the credibility and reliability of the source requires

asking about his or her credentials and cross-checking information from one source with that from others. The process is not simple or easy, but it is essential for producing sound, accurate news stories.

Researching Sources and Topics

Lawrence Grobel, a journalist who has interviewed scores of famous and important people and has written about interviewing, says the successful interviewer must be well informed. That means reading books and articles by or about the person the reporter will interview, researching a company's annual reports and reviewing public documents. When Grobel prepared for an interview with mystery and western novelist Elmore Leonard, he read 14 of the author's books. Sportscaster Jeanne Zelasko was once assigned to cover the Daytona 500, but she knew nothing about NASCAR—in the two weeks she had to prepare for the assignment, she read every book she could find about the sport in a local bookstore. Pat Stith, a former investigative reporter for The Raleigh (North Carolina) News & Observer, says the goal is to know more about the small portion of the subject's job the reporter is interested in than the subject knows.

Journalists who have thoroughly researched a person or topic before an interview will

- Have fresher, more interesting questions for the interview subject.
- Not waste time asking about already established facts.
- Not embarrass themselves by appearing ignorant.
- Be prepared to recognize newsworthy statements the subject makes and ask intelligent follow-up questions.
- Be prepared to spot inconsistencies and evasions in a source's responses.
- Discover additional sources.
- Encourage sources to speak more freely, because they are more likely to trust knowledgeable reporters.

Preparing Questions for the Interview

Good questions elicit interesting quotations and details. Constructing good questions begins when reporters select a unifying central point for their story. With this point in mind, interviewers can decide whom they should interview and what questions they should ask. Say a journalist is planning a profile of a local bank executive who has won several marathons. The central point for the story may be that long-distance running enhances the bank executive's personal and professional life. That idea suggests certain questions to ask the executive and his or her friends and family. If the reporter is investigating the bank's treatment of minorities, however, he or she may still want to interview the same executive, but the central point will be different. It may be how the bank's lending practices affect minorities who want to buy homes or start businesses.

HOT TIP

Steps in Preparing for an Interview

1. Define the purpose. Is this a news, feature or investigative interview? What information is necessary for the story?
2. Decide whom to interview. Sometimes the choices are obvious; other times the reporter may have to research who the best sources are.
3. Assess the character of the interviewee. This may be crucial for feature and investigative interviews where the reporter will have to shape the interview strategy to the interviewee's character.
4. Identify the areas of inquiry. What topics will the interview focus on? What questions will yield the information necessary to write about those topics?
5. Anticipate possible answers to questions. Reporters often can predict an interviewee's answers from their advance research. On the basis of those predictions, they can plan the interview and prepare possible follow-up questions.

FROM THE NEWS

Preparation Helped FBI Interrogate Al-Qaida Suspects

Ali Soufan—a former FBI agent, native of Lebanon and Arabic speaker—was one of the lead interrogators of al-Qaida suspects following the 9/11 attacks. Al-Qaida operatives had been coached to appear to cooperate with investigators by answering questions without offering any new information. Nevertheless, Soufan was able to get valuable information from the suspects he questioned, without using torture—or enhanced interrogation techniques, as it was euphemistically called by some U.S. officials.

The key to a successful interrogation, Soufan explained in his book "The Black Banners," is thorough preparation. He and other FBI interrogators studied al-Qaida extensively and learned as much as they could about the background of each person they questioned. "You have to convince the detainee that you know all about him, and that any lie will be easily uncovered," Soufan wrote. "To do this, you plan the interrogation around what you know."

Journalists rarely will encounter interview subjects as reluctant to cooperate or as well trained in techniques for deflecting questions as al-Qaida operatives. But the principle of thorough preparation still applies. The reporter who has prepared thoroughly for an interview will know when interviewees are being deceptive, trying to spin a topic to make themselves look good or providing newsworthy information.

Sometimes, a journalist may find it helpful in an interview to feign ignorance. While this tactic may be useful in certain cases, being ignorant never helps the journalist.

Once reporters have selected a central point and have researched the topic, they write their questions in advance. They need not write out full questions. Often it is enough to jot down a word or phrase to remind themselves what to ask.

Reporters craft questions to elicit as much information as possible. This means asking open-ended rather than closed-ended questions. The latter can be answered with a yes or no: "Will the state's new tax lid hurt schools?" If journalists want more information, they have to ask follow-up questions. An open-ended question would be, "What will be the effect of the state's new tax lid on schools?" The question requires the source to provide an analysis of the problem.

John Sawatsky, an investigative reporter renowned for his interviewing skill, advises journalists to ask short, neutral questions that begin with "what," "how" and "why" and to a lesser extent "who," "when" and "where." Questions structured as Sawatsky suggests encourage interviewees to tell their stories and reveal their feelings. Questions like "Are you angry?" or "Were you scared?" are not only close-ended but also imply that the interviewer has a preconceived notion about how the subject should have acted or felt. The source might not want to tell his or her story to a reporter who appears to have already decided what happened.

When interviewees have a story to tell, such as how they survived a plane crash or what happened during a bank robbery, reporters should simply let them talk. Something like "Tell me what happened to you" might be enough to encourage

people to tell their story as they remember it. As interviewees talk, journalists should listen carefully. They might think of questions as the subject tells the story, but they should not interrupt. They should wait until the interviewee has finished and then ask any specific follow-up questions.

For feature interviews or personality profiles, some reporters have questions they often use to gain insight into the subject. Here are some examples:

- What do you read?
- Who are your heroes?
- What goals do you have?
- What is a typical day like for you?
- What are your weaknesses or drawbacks?
- How do you compensate for your weaknesses?
- What caused the most significant change in your life?
- How did you cope with that change?

When news sources generalize or give vague answers, reporters ask for anecdotes and examples that support the generalizations or clarify ambiguous responses. Reporters can use the anecdotes, examples and quotations to make their stories more colorful, interesting and understandable. Here are examples of questions crafted to elicit anecdotes and quotations:

- What crime was the most difficult for you to solve in your career as a detective?
- How has the state's new science curriculum changed the way you teach?
- What do you fear the most when you perform before a live audience?
- What steps will you take to prepare your business for the city's sales tax increase?
- How did you overcome your fears following your accident?

Reporters should ask for clarification when they do not understand things sources say. Sometimes that means asking questions that might appear naive or silly, but journalists should not fear asking them. Those who assume they understand what a source said or who fail to ask a critical question out of fear of appearing ignorant could make serious and embarrassing mistakes when they write their stories.

Conducting the Interview

Selecting a Location

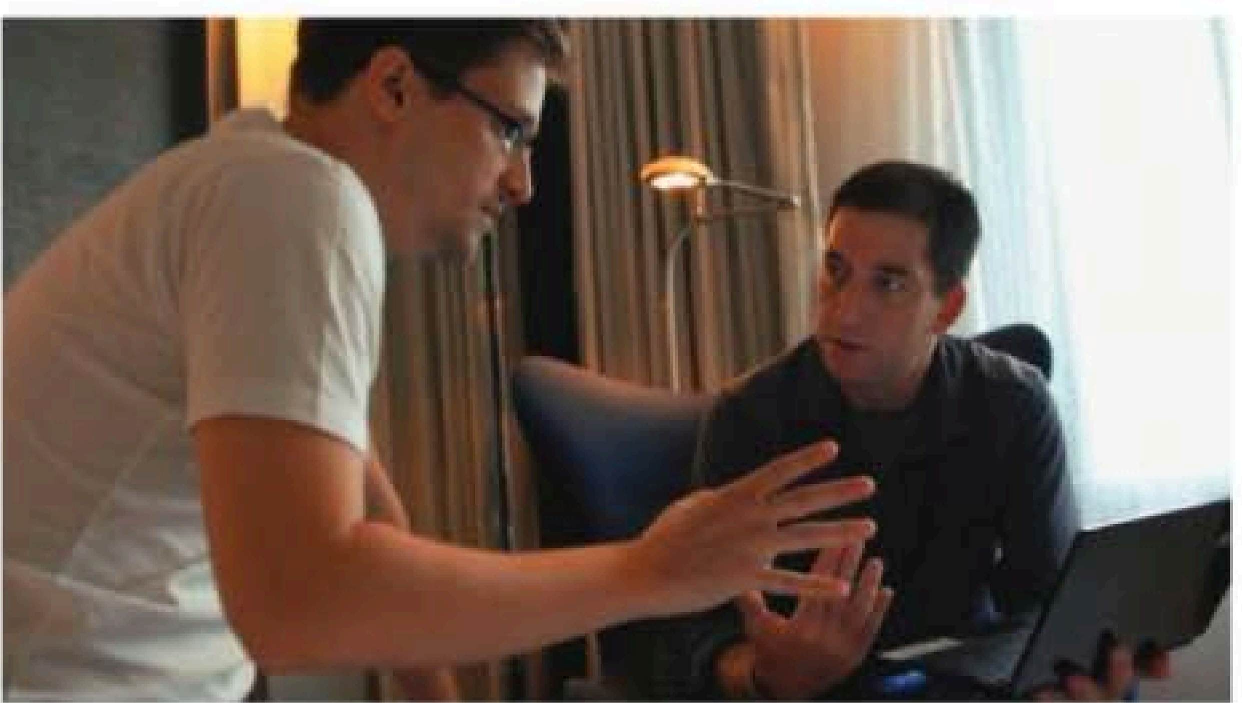
The prospect of being interviewed creates anxiety for some people, making it harder for them to answer questions. Reporters can reduce the unease by conducting interviews in sources' homes or offices, where they feel more comfortable. Additionally, reporters can learn more about a subject by being in his or her environment. Eric Nalder, former senior enterprise reporter for Hearst Newspapers, advises reporters to survey the person's office or home, looking for clues and details. The photos people display on their walls, the clutter on their

desks or the items on their refrigerator doors all give insights about their lives or suggest questions to ask them.

No matter where reporters interview people, they always look for details that will reveal information about the subject. They look for body language, facial expressions, manner of dress, tone of voice and anything else that reveals the source's character. Louisa Thomas' profile of Australian tennis star Nick Kyrgios for The New Yorker included a brief conversation between the two after he had lost a match in a French tournament. Notice how Thomas incorporates description of Kyrgios' dress and appearance:

> Half an hour after the match, I was waiting for the elevator in the lobby of my hotel, when I heard Kyrgios request a new room key. He was still in his kit: black shorts, a magenta Nike top, shoes smeared with ochre clay. His beard was trimmed tight along his jawline, his dark hair shaved on the sides of his head and sculpted on top like a flame.
>
> He stared at his phone as he shuffled to the elevator. As he stepped inside, he looked up. We had met the previous day, and he sounded surprisingly cheerful as he greeted me. "Sorry about the match," I said.
>
> He gave a quick, harsh laugh, and then his voice lightened. "It's all right. It's not a big deal," he said.
>
> He stepped out of the elevator, and I watched the doors close behind his slumped shoulders. There are message-board threads dedicated to Kyrgios's posture, with dozens of comments debating whether the curvature of his upper back requires surgery, interferes with his hormone circulation, or is a faker's lazy pose.

Some places are poor locations for interviews. For example, people unfamiliar with newsrooms may find their noise and chaotic pace intimidating. Lunch appointments also have drawbacks. The idea of a leisurely interview over a meal sounds pleasant, but crowd noise and interruptions from servers interfere with the conversation. Also, reporters or their news organizations should pay for lunch to avoid any appearance that they can be influenced by a generous source. Thus, the practice of interviewing people at a restaurant can become expensive. Whatever the location, a journalist should always arrive early, keep the interview within the agreed-on time and dress appropriately, usually in business clothes.



As shown in the documentary "Citizenfour," Glenn Greenwald (right) interviews Edward Snowden about the NSA documents he leaked to the public. The interview took place in a Hong Kong hotel room, not for Snowden's comfort but to protect him from extradition to the United States.

Organizing the Questions

Reporters should start an interview with a clear statement of its purpose, if that's not already understood. For brief news interviews, they

usually try to get right to the main questions. Longer interviews often begin with a few minutes of small talk to put a source at ease.

Once the serious questioning begins, reporters should take charge of the conversation, decide what questions to ask, keep the interview on track and make sure the source answers every question fully. If a subject wanders or tries to evade questions, journalists bring the conversation back to the central topic and politely but firmly ask him or her to respond to the questions.

Questions should be grouped by topic. A reporter who is planning to profile a candidate for mayor, for example, may want to cover the person's education, work history, family life, community service, political experience and campaign platform. For each of these topics, the reporter might have four or five questions. Journalists try to organize the topics, making it easy for the interviewee to move from one to the next. Chronological organization and reverse chronological order are two methods used. For a reporter interviewing a scientist about the effects of global warming, chronology is meaningless; it would make more sense to use a different organization, such as moving from effects on oceans and ocean life to effects on land animals and finally to effects on humans. In still other situations, the reporter might let the topics come up on their own and simply make sure that the interviewee covers all essential points.

Reporters organize the questions they ask as well as the topics they want to cover. One approach—sometimes called the funnel—starts with a general question and moves to progressively more specific ones (see Figure 11.1). The reverse funnel starts with questions about specifics and moves to more general matters.

Journalists start interviews with some noncontroversial comments or soft questions that will break the ice. Even a polite question about the weather can start the conversation. Once the interviewee becomes comfortable talking, the reporter asks more difficult questions. The most embarrassing or difficult questions are held for the end. By then, the subject should be more at ease. Moreover, if a source refuses to answer embarrassing questions and abruptly ends the interview, the reporter will have already obtained most of the information needed for the story.

Experienced interviewers prepare so thoroughly before an interview that they encounter few surprises, but occasionally an interview yields unexpected information. If the information is newsworthy, reporters abandon their original plans and pursue the new angles. "Morning Joe" hosts Joe Scarborough and Mika Brzezinski were wrapping up an interview with Michael Avenatti, attorney for Stephanie Clifford (better known as Stormy Daniels) who claimed to have had a sexual encounter with President Donald Trump, when Brzezinski asked Avenatti if Clifford had been threatened to keep silent about the incident. Avenatti's statement that she had been threatened surprised them and became the most newsworthy disclosure of the interview.

At the end of an interview, reporters should always ask sources if they have anything to add. Sometimes the most newsworthy information emerges in their response. Journalists should ask for the names of other people to interview or for documents that might provide additional information or verification. They also should determine the best time to call sources if they have follow-up questions. Finally, they should thank subjects for granting the interview.

HOT TIP

Interview Traps to Avoid

Reporters have an infinite number of approaches they can take to conducting an interview, but they should avoid some traps:

- Don't make statements; just ask questions: Questions will elicit the subject's opinions and ideas, but statements might lead the subject to suspect the journalist is biased and will not report the interview fairly.
- Don't ask double-barreled questions, which might have more than one correct answer: An interviewer asked Bill Clinton, when he first ran for president, "Was Gennifer Flowers your lover for 12 years?" Clinton answered, "That allegation is false." But which part was false? Splitting the question into two might have yielded a better answer.
- Don't use loaded words in questions: "Mayor Datolli, will your budget scheme save the city from bankruptcy?" A "scheme" may seem disreputable. A more neutral term would be "plan."
- Don't ask questions that suggest what you think the answer should be: Asking "Was the robber carrying a shotgun?" implies that you think the robber did so. An uncertain interviewee might be tempted to confirm that suspicion, even if it is wrong.

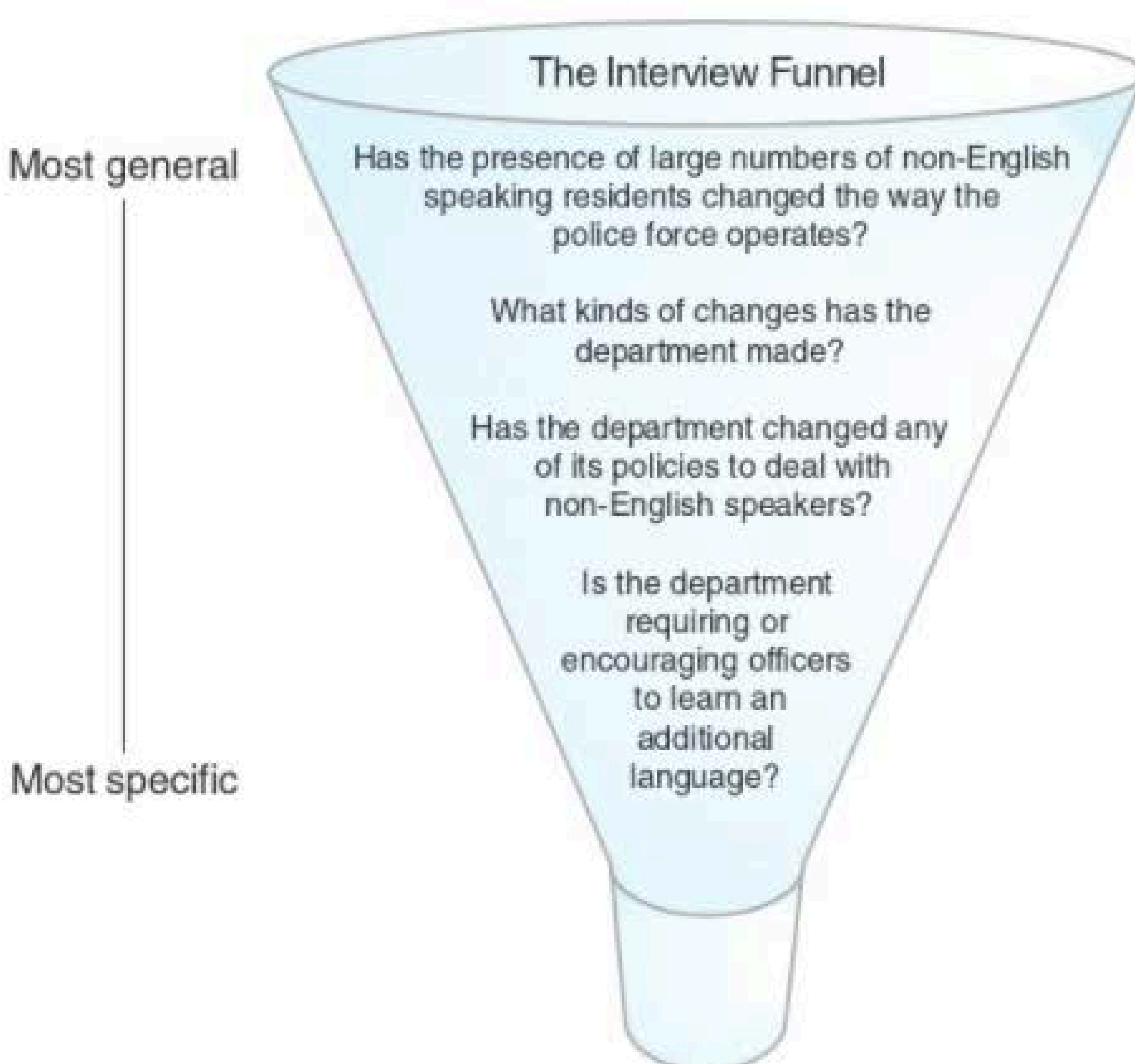


Figure 11.1 The Interview Funnel The funnel style of organization places the broadest—or most general—questions at the top and the most specific at the bottom. The reverse funnel approach moves from most specific to the most general. The approach a reporter uses depends on the situation, topic and source.

Dealing with Reluctant Sources and Asking Tough Questions

Most sources cooperate with reporters because they welcome the opportunity to tell their side of a story. Some, however, dislike talking to journalists or are hostile. They may fear a topic is too difficult for reporters to understand; they may have been embarrassed by reporters in earlier interviews; or they may suspect the resulting story will portray them in a bad light.

Reporters first try to learn why the source is hesitant to speak to them. They may then be able to overcome the specific objection. In some cases, sources fear the interview will turn into an interrogation. Journalists might ease this anxiety by showing empathy. Grobel has said, "To be a good interviewer, you have to become a chameleon, changing the colors of your personality to fit the mood of the person you are interviewing." Good interviewers convey the feeling they are more interested in sources than in themselves.

When sources fear their words will be distorted or misunderstood, reporters can demonstrate their knowledge of the topic and background by asking intelligent questions or pointing to other stories they have written on the topic. The interviewees may then be willing to fill in the gaps. Explaining the purpose of the interview and the story also can help convince sources that reporters are knowledgeable and trustworthy.

Some sources worry the story will cause them to lose their jobs or money or even to face criminal prosecution. Reporters can soothe these fears by explaining that the interview is an opportunity for subjects to put their side of a story before the public and that failure to do so will make them look worse.

Interviewers have a variety of tactics for getting reluctant sources to talk. If an interviewee is unresponsive, reporters may switch topics, trying to find something that will get him or her to talk. In some instances, journalists can build rapport with sources by expressing admiration (if it is genuine) for something the person did or said. Or they might draw on their background to establish a connection with a reluctant source. If the interviewee is a college president, the reporter might mention that his or her father was a college professor (if that is true).

Many interviews—whether done for feature or investigative stories—require reporters to ask tough questions that the source might find embarrassing or potentially harmful. Failure to ask the questions, however, means an interview will be incomplete and lack news value. Asking difficult questions is easier when reporters maintain their neutrality. If interviewees believe reporters are just asking questions and not expressing opinions, they answer tough questions more willingly.

Reporters can enhance their appearance of neutrality by asking questions in ways that distance them from the opinions the questions may imply. They can, for example,

- Attribute the question or point of view implied in the question to a third party or to public opinion generally. For example, "Chancellor Smith, some faculty members have said you attach more importance to intercollegiate athletics than to academics. What is your response?"
- Sugar-coat questions. Asking a person, "Is there anything about your marriage that you now regret?" is easier than asking, "Did you abuse your spouse?"
- Ask interviewees to explain their previous statements or actions or give their versions of controversial events.
- Ask interviewees to talk about others. Once they begin, it often is easier to shift the interview to their own ideas and actions.
- Ask interviewees for the names of people who support or criticize them. Then ask them to guess what their critics are most likely to say about them. Nalder says this tactic often elicits information and tips for additional interviews.

No matter what approach reporters use, they must be persistent. If sources refuse to talk, hang up the phone or slam the door, reporters should go back the next day or next week and try again.

Sources pressed to talk about sensitive topics sometimes try to evade the question or even lie. When subjects avoid an issue or give fuzzy answers, reporters can restate the question, forcing them to be more forthcoming. Reporters can also simply remain silent, which tells sources their answer is insufficient and pushes them to elaborate. In some cases, journalists might want to confront sources directly about evasive answers, saying they will note evasions in the story.

Reporters who have done their homework will often know when a source is lying. Nalder lets interviewees he suspects are lying spin out their tales. He interrupts them only to ask for elaboration or more detail. Once he has the source's entire story, he can begin to use the facts he has already gathered to pick the story apart and get that person to tell the truth.

Although he probably was not aware of it, Soufan's interrogation method, described earlier in this chapter, follows Nalder's techniques for dealing with sources who lie. In his book mentioned earlier, Soufan says the questioning never began with big or intimidating questions like "Did you meet Osama bin Laden?" Instead, the FBI agents focused on getting details with questions like these:

- Why did you go to Afghanistan?
- How did you travel there?
- How was the trip funded?

Award-winning journalist Eric Nalder, former chief investigative reporter for the Seattle Post-Intelligencer, offers various tips for interviewing reluctant sources in his article "Loosening Lips: The Art of the Interview."

FROM THE NEWS

An Interview with Bill Cosby

Sometimes a source will simply refuse to answer the hard question, as happened when National Public Radio's Scott Simon interviewed Bill and Camille Cosby for Weekend Edition. Simon was interviewing the Cosbys because they had contributed to an art exhibit. But shortly before the interview, The Washington Post published a column by Barbara Bowman, who said Cosby had sexually assaulted her several times in 1985. Simon felt obliged to ask Cosby about it. Here is their exchange:

> SCOTT SIMON: This question gives me no pleasure, Mr. Cosby, but there have been serious allegations raised about you in recent days.
>
> BILL COSBY: [SILENCE]
>
> SIMON: You're shaking your head no. I'm in the news business. I have to ask the question. Do you have any response to those charges?
>
> COSBY: [SILENCE]
>
> SIMON: Shaking your head no. There are people who love you who might like to hear from you about this. I want to give you the chance.
>
> COSBY: [SILENCE]
>
> SIMON: All right. Camille and Bill Cosby. They have lent 62 pieces from their collection of African and African-American art to create an exhibit called *Conversations: African and African American Artworks in Dialogue*. It's now on display at the Smithsonian National Museum of African Art through early 2016. Thank you both.

- Who picked you up at the airport?
- Where did you stay in Afghanistan?
- Whom did you meet?

By focusing on the small details, the FBI investigators made it hard for the al-Qaida operatives to maintain a cover story. Inconsistencies in the details exposed lies and revealed areas where the interrogators could focus their efforts.

Reporters should never try to bully hostile sources or try to deceive them about the purpose of an interview. Information obtained from a source who has been intimidated may be unreliable. People who have been led to believe an interview will be about one topic when the reporters want information about something else will feel unprepared to respond fully and accurately.

Special Situations

TELEPHONE INTERVIEWS

Telephone calls save reporters enormous amounts of time. Some sources are more comfortable talking without someone watching them; others consider it a welcome break in the day. But telephone interviews have disadvantages, too. They must be brief and superficial. Sources usually have other work, and long telephone conversations may bore or annoy them. Particularly frustrating for reporters is playing phone tag with a source while on deadline.

Telephone calls are an unsatisfactory means of conducting in-depth interviews about controversial or complex issues and personalities. Cultivating sources is difficult if they are known only by telephone. Getting a source to discuss embarrassing or personal matters requires a rapport best established face to face.

EMAIL INTERVIEWS

Email offers another way of interviewing sources. Reporters use this method to contact hard-to-reach or reluctant sources. Even people who travel a lot check their email. Sources who dodge phone calls or hesitate to return voice mails may answer a journalist's email. A reporter trying to contact several sources for similar information can use email to send the same message to each of them.

Email interviews have some advantages over telephone interviews. Besides being more convenient for some sources, the format also affords them an opportunity to develop their thoughts in detail, which means reporters get more thorough answers to their questions. Email also provides a written record of the interviews, lessening the chance for misquotation.

However, journalists relying on email interviews are deprived of their sources' facial expressions, vocal inflections and body language, all of which can help reporters understand their sources better. Also, the email response is less spontaneous. The offhand comments sources make in person or telephone interviews give reporters additional insights that they can follow up on quickly. Finally, reporters conducting email interviews recognize the possibility that the person responding is not the one they want to contact. For example, a business executive might have a PR person draft an answer to a journalist's email.

ONLINE INTERVIEWS

Reporters can use their computers to interview subjects, using programs like Skype or Zoom. Because the programs use the computer's video capabilities, reporters and subjects can see as well as hear each other. And the responses the journalist gets are more spontaneous than those obtained through an email interview. Some of the programs for online video allow one or both parties to record the conversation, creating a permanent record of what was said.

Online interviews, however, are essentially high-tech telephone interviews, so subjects are just as likely to get bored. If the subject is at work or at home, he or she may have to deal with distractions. And if one party or the other has a poor internet connection, the interview may become difficult or impossible to carry out.

INTERVIEWING FOR BROADCAST

Reporters interviewing sources for radio or television experience problems print reporters don't face. Terry Gross, host of the NPR program "Fresh Air" and one of the best interviewers in the business, told American Journalism Review, "For most print journalists the interview is the raw material for the piece, along with everything else the reporter has seen and heard in researching the story. For me the interview is the piece." Gross arranges her questions so that the answers produce a narrative, not just a series of disconnected answers.

Television reporters need to plan their interviews in advance with the technicians who will be operating the cameras and sound equipment, especially if the interview needs to be shot quickly for broadcast that day or if the source does

Telephone and Email Etiquette

For telephone interviews, reporters should

- Identify themselves and their news organizations clearly at the start of the conversation.
- Never pose as someone other than a reporter.
- Ask permission to record the interview digitally or on tape.

For email interviews, reporters should

- Use a salutation (such as "Dear Mrs. Ramirez,").
- Identify themselves and the news organization they represent.
- Usually review the background of an event or issue before they ask their questions.
- Tell sources their deadline and thank them for their time and expertise.
- Never write in all capital letters, which some regard as shouting.
- Never use acronyms, such as "BTW" ("by the way"), because not everyone understands them.

Terry Gross interviews musician Questlove for a live "Fresh Air" recording at the Penn Museum in 2016.

not want to appear on camera. They also should show the interview subject doing more than talking. Where possible, television journalists ask the subject to demonstrate an activity or respond to a video or another source.

Taking Notes

Skilled interviewers take copious notes, writing down much more information than they can possibly use. Unless reporters take detailed notes, they will forget much of what is said. They might not recognize the importance of a piece of information until well after the interview—or several interviews—when they are writing their stories. Recording as much as possible decreases the chances for errors or omissions. Reporters can easily ignore notes that later prove to be unimportant or irrelevant, but filling gaps left by poor note taking is more difficult.

Most reporters develop their own shortcuts for taking notes. They leave out some words, abbreviate others, or jot down names, numbers, good quotations and key ideas. When sources speak too rapidly, interviewers can ask them to slow down or repeat important statements. Note taking makes some sources nervous. Journalists should explain that the notes will help them write more accurate and thorough stories.

After completing interviews, reporters review their notes immediately, while everything is fresh in their minds. They may want to fill gaps in their information or be certain they understand everything a source said. Journalists often write their stories as soon as possible after their interviews. The longer they wait, the more likely they are to forget some facts or distort others.

Recording Interviews

Reporter Vanessa Schledier Bild interviews Major Aryeh Shaliker, a spokesman for the Israeli army, near Ashkelon, Israel.

Using a digital or a tape recorder frees reporters to concentrate on the questions they want to ask and sources' responses. Recorders also provide verbatim and permanent records, so interviewers make fewer factual errors. When reporters play the recording, they often find important statements they failed to notice during the interviews.

Recorders also have drawbacks. After recording a one-hour interview, reporters may have to replay it at least once before writing the story. They may also have difficulty locating important facts or quotations. By comparison, they may need a minute or less to find a fact or a quotation in their handwritten notes.

Even reporters who record major interviews usually augment recordings with written notes.

They can consult their notes to write the stories and use the recordings to verify important facts and quotations. If a recorder has a counter, reporters can use it to note the location of important or interesting quotations.

Although recorders are commonplace, some sources still refuse to be recorded. Recorders are small enough that reporters can easily hide them in their pockets or handbags, but taping a conversation without the other party's consent is sometimes illegal. As noted in Chapter 5, in most states, one may record a conversation with the consent of only one party. In the case of an interview, the consenting party would be the person doing the taping. Eleven states require the consent of all parties in most or all circumstances. Even where it is legal, taping a conversation without the other party's consent raises ethical questions. Undisclosed recording seems manipulative and invasive. Audiences may consider any information reporters obtain in this manner tainted.

Final Thoughts

Interviewing is an art form that requires practice. Journalists who are most successful at interviewing have done it for years and have developed insights into their sources and into their own strengths and weaknesses in relating to other people. Gross says, "My theory of interviewing is that whatever you have, use it. If you are confused, use that. If you have raw curiosity, use that. If you have experience, use that. If you have a lot of research, use that. But figure out what it is you have and make it work for you." Student journalists often lack the experience and the maturity to know what they have and how to make it work for them. Their initial attempts at interviewing may disappoint them. Young reporters should not become discouraged, however. With time and persistence, they can become excellent interviewers.

Writing the Interview Story

Writing a story based on an in-depth interview, such as a personality profile, is little different from writing any other news story. Most interview stories begin with a summary lead that presents the story's central point. The following paragraphs include the highlights. Reporters may use an alternative lead, such as an anecdote or description that introduces a nut graph containing the central point.

The body of the story usually is organized by topic, with facts and quotations presented in the order of their importance, not the order in which the source provided them. Reporters must be sure that they keep every direct and indirect quotation in its proper context. A well-written interview story will not string together quotations from the sources but use them for emphasis and impact. Journalists also usually limit background information to a minimum and incorporate it where it is most necessary and helpful for explaining a source's remarks.

An alternative form for writing an interview story is the question-and-answer format. Few reporters use it, however, because it requires too much space and makes it difficult for the audience to grasp a story's highlights quickly. The Q-and-A structure works best with celebrity interviews, self-help stories and sidebars for main stories. Q-and-A stories are never verbatim transcripts of interviews, even though the format creates that impression. The interviews are usually heavily edited to eliminate boring and irrelevant passages.

Guest Columnist

Interviewing Three People about a Deadly Accident

BY DON STACOM

Celebrating one of the last summer nights of school vacation in Connecticut, four teenagers hung out at a friend's pool party and then sped home on a dark, two-lane road in a Subaru WRX.

Police estimate the driver was doing 100 to 140 when he lost control on a curve. The WRX slid sideways, demolished a Taurus in the other lane and then slammed roof-first into a utility pole. Everyone in the WRX was killed.

For news reporters across the state, this was another "reckless teenage drivers" story. They happen a lot.

Covering them can be as depressing as a funeral, and every bit as predictable: It starts with a splashy story, follows with profiles of the dead teens, and then shifts to the memorial services, the weeping friends, the grieving relatives.

And that's about it. The news moves on.

Every so often, though, there's a chance to report something much deeper. At these times, the reporter's work becomes as challenging, emotionally draining—and as rewarding—as any job that exists. You get to do something that genuinely makes a difference.

With the WRX case, it began with thinking about all the people who were hurt: Literally hundreds of teenagers showed up at the crash scene to stare and cry. And there were, of course, the four devastated families.

Beyond that were the overlooked victims: the innocent people in the Taurus who sustained crippling injuries, and the emergency crews who saw carnage that battered their psyches.

They all suffered in very different ways, but they also shared an agonizing frustration at how needless this tragedy was. They desperately wanted to put some meaning to their pain.

All of that provided the structure for a story showing how one bad decision could crumple many, many lives. The plan was simple, though not easy: Months after the crash, three people would tell exactly how they experienced that night of horror. The father of one of the dead girls, the first cop on the scene and the front-seat passenger in the Taurus would relive what they went through.

That was the theory. But how do you make that actually happen? Step one is the research; a reporter who already knows the fundamental facts will have much more credibility when approaching these people to talk. To do that, reporters for the Hartford Courant reviewed the police reports, read obituaries and Facebook memorials and revisited the scene.

Next came building rapport with the dad, the cop and the woman from the Taurus. This story hinged on their cooperation; a reporter must develop their trust that the story won't be tawdry or exploitative. At the same time, the reporter gently talked them through what the interviews will be like—letting them know ahead of time that these conversations would bring up the worst of the painful stuff. This was the time to invite them to decline; if they're committed, they'll persevere.

Pre-interview preparations are crucial here. To build intelligent questions, first imagine a bit of what they saw and felt. Imagine being the first police officer at such devastation; this brings the interview questions "Whom do you go to first?" and "How does your mind even process all of this?" For the woman from the Taurus, you ask about her memory of the moments before the impact—and those right afterward, too. Has she made peace with being the entirely innocent victim of such a horrific crash?

Through the interview, the reporter had to stay alert for what's fresh and what's powerful, for the sights and sounds and feelings that these people recall. And most importantly, the end of the talk was time to softly, genuinely thank each person for putting themselves through that again. After that came the job of organizing and writing a story that would make it worthwhile.

Don Stacom is a reporter for The Hartford Courant in Connecticut.

The Reporter's Guide to Interviewing

1. Determine whether the story will be a news story, a feature or an investigative story.
2. For all types of stories, interview to get facts, details, chronologies, context and anecdotes.
3. For feature stories, capture the source's environment, appearance and mannerisms.
4. For investigative stories, get the source's version of events, explanations of contradictions and replies to charges.
5. Identify the best available sources who can provide the necessary information for the story.
6. In deciding how many sources to interview, keep in mind deadlines, the expertise of the sources, the degree of controversy regarding the issue and the complexity of the issue.
7. Research people and issues as thoroughly as possible before conducting any interviews.
8. Select questions that will address the central point of the planned story.
9. Use questions that will encourage interviewees to talk—then let them talk with as few interruptions as possible.
10. Interview sources in places where they will be comfortable, not newsrooms or restaurants.
11. Organize questions by topic and raise topics in an order that will make it easy for sources to move from one to the next.
12. If a source is reluctant to talk or is hostile, find out why and try to address the concern.
13. Maintain neutrality when asking tough questions. Sources are more likely to answer tough questions from neutral interviewers than from those who seem to be advocates for a point of view.
14. Telephone interviews save time, but they are unsatisfactory for long, in-depth interviews.
15. Email is an effective way of interviewing some sources, but the interviewer is deprived of information about the source's demeanor and personality.
16. Remember that a broadcast interview is the story and not just raw material for a story.
17. Take thorough notes during the interview, making sure to write down names, dates, numbers and good quotations.
18. Recorders provide a verbatim permanent record, but they are sometimes clumsy to use.