

LESSON 2: INTERVIEW



HOW TO PREPARE

- **Research:** Know as much about the person and their projects, or the topics as possible (basic info, education, awards, recent or relevant projects/experience, how they relate to your topic).
- **List of Questions:** Write out a list of questions beforehand. Send a few sample questions or list of topics to the interviewee.
- **Communication:** Decide how you will conduct the interview: phone, email, in-person (always ask permission to record).

Tip: For phone or in-person interviews, it is sometimes helpful to send the interview questions beforehand so that the person has time to think about some of the answers. You don't have to provide the exact questions if you want to get more of an off-the-cuff response, but a general idea of the topics you will cover.

In professional interviews, there are sometimes stipulations about things that the interviewee does NOT want to talk about. It's worth asking this up front if you think this might be an issue, to avoid any friction during the interview.

QUESTIONS

Ask leading and open-ended questions—something that will be interesting for readers but also guide the narrative and help the interviewee to give clear and interesting answers.

Ex. Tell us about being a self-published author.

↳ Too broad, kind of boring, open ended, rigid.

Ex. Much of your writing has to do with dispelling myths; what are the three biggest misconceptions about being a self-published author?

↳ Specific, interesting, feels more like a conversation (also begins with an observation or lead-in. This is a good way to break up the monotony of Q, A, Q, A, and give it more of a conversational tone.)

What is the purpose or angle of the interview? This is going to determine the type of questions you ask.

Ask interesting questions to get interesting answers! “Tell me the three best things...”, “what is your most memorable experience...” “if you could be a superhero...”

HOW TO WRITE UP THE INTERVIEW: TRANSCRIPT VS. NARRATIVE

- **Transcript:** Script of the audio interview, very common form, most often found in magazines or online publications.
 - » Pros: easy to read, conversational, more about the editing than writing in shaping the story
- **Narrative:** Written more like an essay, told as a story from the writer’s perspective.
 - » Pros: able to put into a larger context, writer can give their own observations or opinions, allows for shaping and giving the story more of an angle

TIPS

- Leave room for follow-up questions. The idea is to keep them talking.
- Record the interview if you can. It’s easier to go back and listen than to take notes the whole time. You **MUST** get permission to record the conversation. Most people will say yes.
- Be a good listener: help them clarify, mirror back to them their response so that you are clear on what they are trying to communicate.
- Make sure to fact check. Even if your interview subject is honest and reliable, people sometimes make mistakes with dates, etc. or don’t remember things quite right. It’s always good to double check things of public record just to be sure.
- Last question: Is there anything else you’d like to add? Anything else you want people to know?

Example of Interviews in Narrative form: [New York Times Saturday Profiles](#)

Example of interviews in Transcript Form: [NPR’s Interview With Bernie Sanders](#)



CHALLENGE

Look at your favorite magazine. You can almost always find at least one interview in a magazine or trade publication. Pick your favorite, and find an interview. Notice how the interview is conducted, what type of questions they ask, how is it written up.

Now, think of someone you would like to interview (be creative!) and come up with a few sample questions.

Email your challenge to laurelnakai@gmail.com by July 25