

# 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 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 #5C) 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.