

# Interviewing

**As a writer can you build trust with an interviewee and get the information you need?**



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## What is an in-depth interview?

Whether journalist, technical writer, science writer, researcher, or student, an in-depth interview can be defined as a qualitative attempt to solicit information from a subject-matter-expert for use in constructing a report, article, or assignment.





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## Steps taken by a good interviewer:

Be sure to select a subject-matter-expert that can most help you with the information you need, that can most support your thesis, theme, or angle.



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## **Steps taken by a good interviewer:**

Before you contact your interviewee, know where you are coming from and what your intention is. Be open and honest with your subject-matter-expert. The more trust the interviewee feels, the more relaxed, the more information he or she will be willing to share.



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## Steps taken by a good interviewer:

**Be small and personable. It's a privilege to be invited into someone's world for an intimate conversation about their life and work. Unless you are doing investigative journalism, no trace of cynicism should creep into this relationship, this process of "uncovering."**

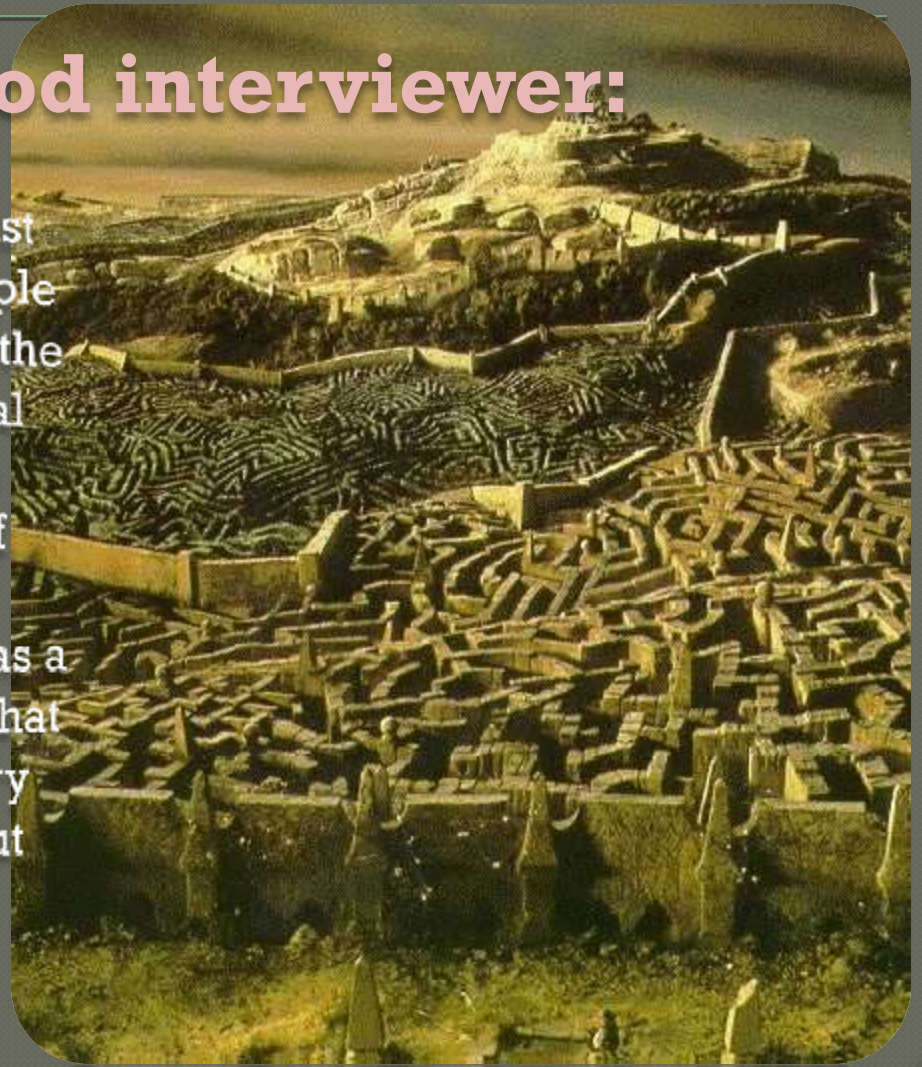




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## Steps taken by a good interviewer:

Another reason for establishing trust quickly and confidently? Most people like to talk about their work. When the conversation turns to more personal matters, however, even to harmless biographical inquiries like place of birth, year, college, etc., many interviewees shut down. Treat this as a general rule, even an assumption, that many successful people can be very humble and do not like to talk about themselves. Be prepared to work around this.



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## Steps taken by a good interviewer:

Allow the interviewee to establish any terms of confidentiality, subjects that are off limits for questioning or publication.





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## **Steps taken by a good interviewer:**

Whenever possible, it's always better to conduct an interview in-person on the interviewee's home turf.

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## Steps taken by a good interviewer:

When meeting in person is not possible, phone conversations may be the next best bet, but don't exclude email. Some interviewees may open up more through writing responses than by answering questions over the phone. If you can't meet in person, give your subject an option between a phone conversation and email.





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## Steps taken by a good interviewer:

Before the interview, do as much research as possible. Find out what you can on the internet or by talking to others. Take care of as much as you can before hand so that actual interview time can be spent on what you really need.



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## Steps taken by a good interviewer:

Prepare a comprehensive list of open ended questions. Even if you need to ask a closed question that may require only a “yes” or “no” answer, always do it in a way that allows your interviewee a comfort zone for free elaboration.





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## **Steps taken by a good interviewer:**

**Construct and frame questions in a neutral manner. Ask the big questions one at a time.**



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## Steps taken by a good interviewer:

Question prep is kind of like playing chess. You won't know exactly what the interviewee will say, but you will know the basic content of their answer. This puts you in an aggressive intellectual dynamic of trying to anticipate and keep the interview going while at the same time hunting for segues or opportunities for digression or free elaboration.



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## **Steps taken by a good interviewer:**

If you demonstrate that you've done your homework, the interviewee will respect your efforts.

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## Steps taken by a good interviewer:

When you arrive at the interview, crank up your senses, be hyperaware of everything around. You should now be a sponge—pure, humble, curious, trustworthy, respectful, honest. Write down all your observations and emotions. You must work quickly without appearing erratic.





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## **Steps taken by a good interviewer:**

Establish trust and rapport quickly. Create a safe zone for you and the interviewee. Build rapport. This is critical. Make sure your own expressions and body language signal genuine interest in what the interviewee is saying.



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## Steps taken by a good interviewer:

Recognize when your interviewee may become uncomfortable with a response. Learn to read expressions and body language. Remember, comfort and trust are key.

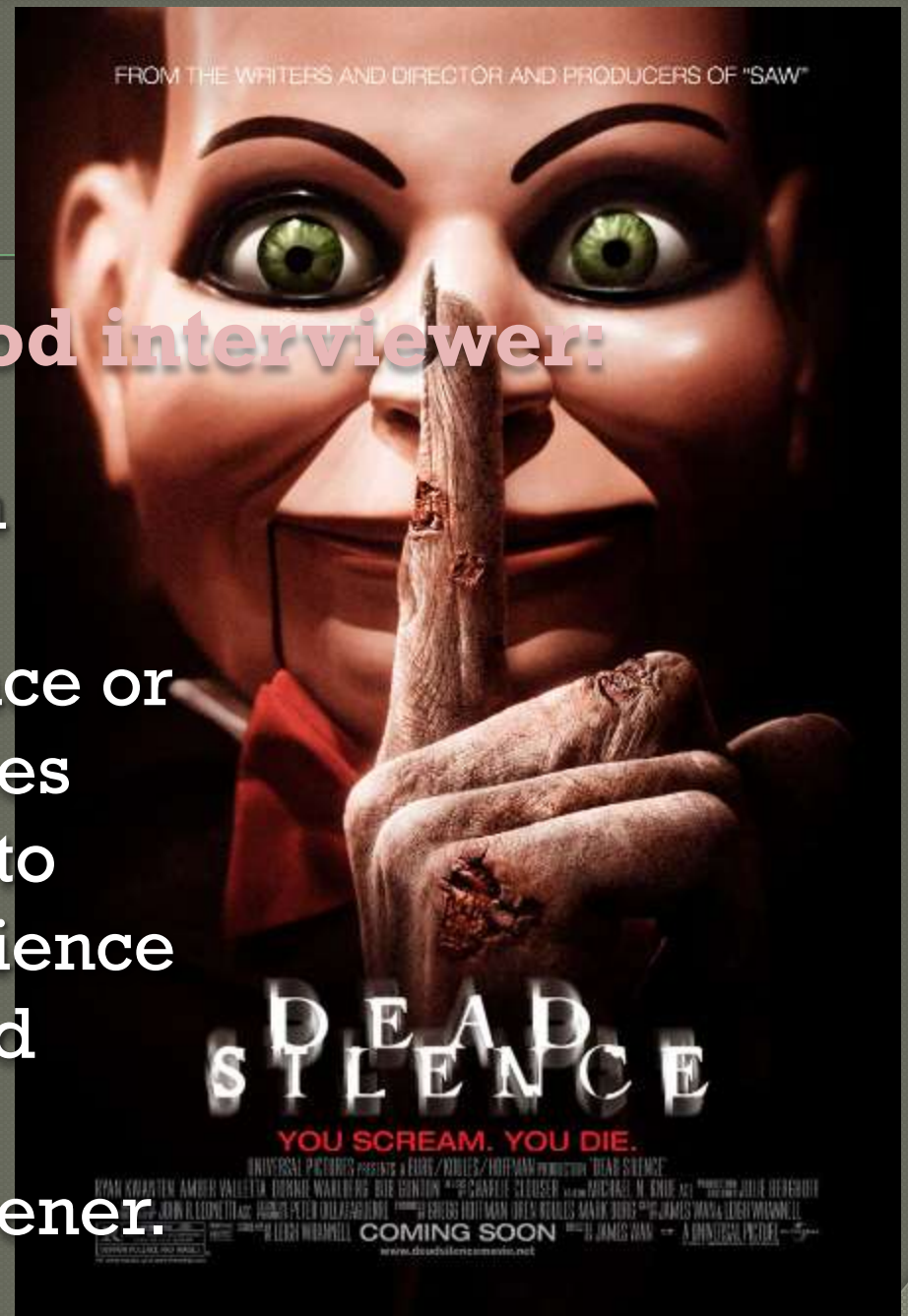




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## Steps taken by a good interviewer:

- Don't answer your own questions;
- Don't be afraid of silence or "dead space." (Sometimes interviewees need time to collect thoughts and patience can go a long way toward augmenting trust.); and
- Learn to be a great listener.



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## Steps taken by a good interviewer:

Be sure prior to the interview that:

- You can get there on time;
- There is enough time, even extra time;
- You select a place devoid of distractions; and
- You have extra batteries for your recorder and extra pens to write with.





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## Steps taken by a good interviewer:

Record the interview with a mini cassette or digital recorder. Be prepared to spend time transcribing the interview yourself. If you are writing a profile, every inflection, expression, way your interviewee describes something is important to hear again to understanding his or her character.



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## Steps taken by a good interviewer:

Using a video recorder is acceptable as well, as long as the interviewee agrees. Always get permission for any kind of recording.





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## **Steps taken by a good interviewer:**

Even though you are using a recorder, write as much down as you can. Don't hesitate to ask for clarity or for the interviewee to repeat something if you are unsure of what he or she has said. Ask for explanations. It is ok to get side-tracked, but don't forget when and how to go back and pick up the thread.

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## Steps taken by a good interviewer:

End the interview on time if the interviewee is busy. Build enough time into your schedule in case the interviewee invites you to go down to the lab to see research for example, or have lunch, or talk to his or her colleagues.

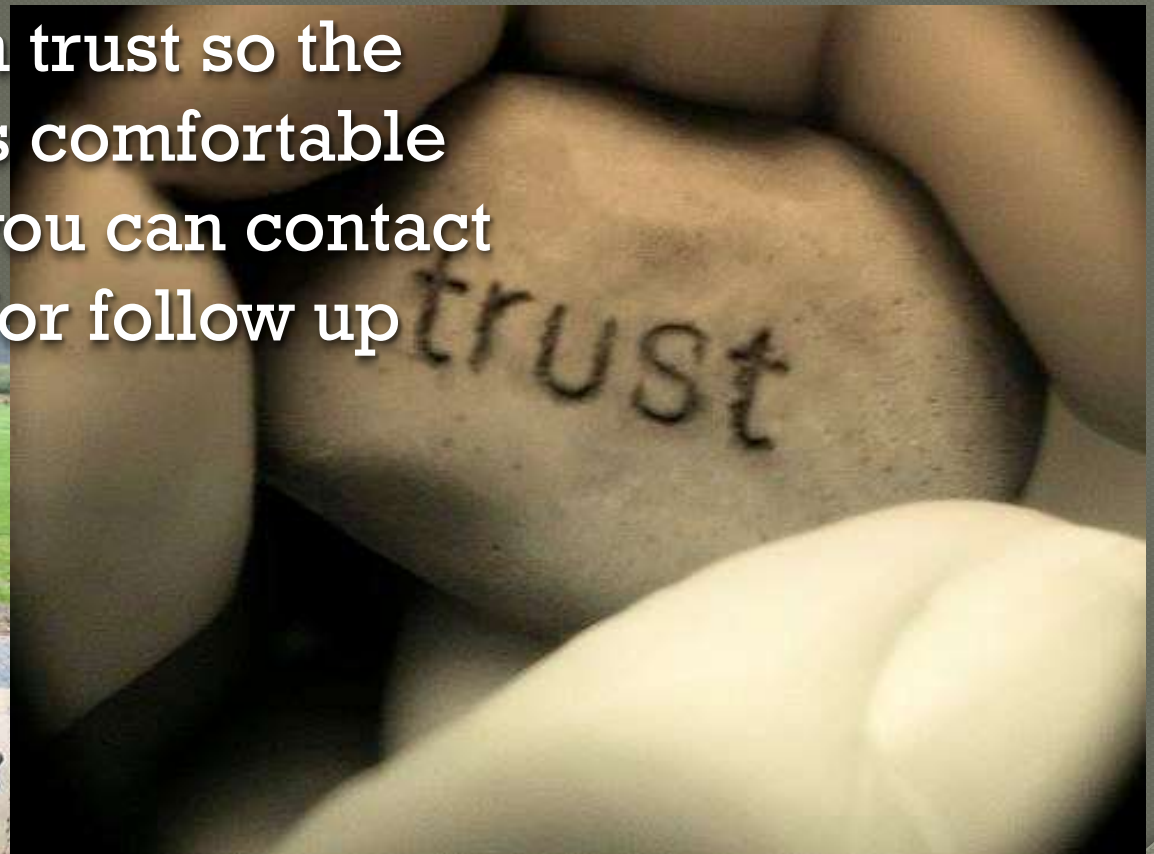


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## Steps taken by a good interviewer:

Establish enough trust so the interviewee feels comfortable when you ask if you can contact him or her later for follow up questions.





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## Steps taken by a good interviewer:

End on a pleasant and polite note. Be gracious. Leave your contact information in case the interviewee wants to contact you later.



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## Steps taken by a good interviewer:

Remember, your senses and observations are still on high alert. Write down your impressions after you leave the interview.



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