

## Guidelines for Interviewing

A good interview is the key to a good profile. Once you've done that you can write it up in a couple of ways. Either as a question and answer, which is basically an edited transcript of your interview; or you can write it as an actual article, interspersing direct quotes with paraphrasing and a bit of description.

We don't want to give you hard and fast rules for interviewing – everyone has their own style, which will develop as you get more experience, and different manners suit different interviewees and purposes. There are a few things you should know though.

### People who you interview:

**'Ordinary people'**. This generally takes a bit of asking around – friends, family, workmates, until you find the person you're looking for. EG. Someone who's travelled to a particular country, someone who has experienced racism, a self-confessed coffee addict, etc. If you're writing on an issue, like being young and gay, or having an eating disorder, there are support groups around who can often hook you up with someone who has dealt with the issue and is now helping others.

Getting interviews with **'officials'**, that is, people who can give you facts or back up the opinion of the ordinary person, are pretty easy to get. You generally just have call the right government department, non government organisation or national body, and they'll put you onto the right person.

For **celebrity interviews**, This is not usually going to be a big one on the Just Focus sites – but there are always opportunities! A band you love may be saying some really on-to-it political things or someone might be using their fame to promote a cause. You can try contacting their PR company to organise an interview – if they are big this could be pretty hard. If they're lesser known musicians, or if they don't have a PR company behind them, you can usually just get contact details from their website and approach them yourself, or if it's a local band, hell, just wander backstage after the gig and tell 'em you wanna make them famous.

**Note: Beware the celebrity charm.** When you're interviewing someone famous, it's really easy to get caught up in their 'celebrity charm'. Most of the time the reason they're famous is because

they're very charismatic and talented people. So when you first start interviewing people it can be easy to get swept up in it, giggle like an obsessed school girl and stop listening to what they're really saying. The result is a usually another saccharine, adoring profile. So be on your guard. And rest assured that after a few months you realise they're all saying the same thing anyway, just in varying American and British twangs.

**Sports interviews.** The easiest way to hook these up is through national sports associations. If they're a big enough success to be featured in a national magazine, chances are a national [insert sport here] association will know how to get in touch with them. Use Google.

### **General advice once you've got the interview.**

- Make sure you've got a dictaphone and/or pen that works. Double check batteries, tapes, connections, ink. No matter how many times you've done it before, something is always likely to go wrong. Also, if you become a good note taker instead of relying on the old dictaphone, it can make typing up the article a lot faster.
- Email interviews can be one of the easiest and convenient ways to get it done. But don't overuse it just cause you're too chicken to call someone. Use it if the person's a million miles away, or you just can't find a time to meet, or they're chronically shy. It can be a risk if you don't know how articulate and expressive a person is going to be over email. Someone may be monosyllabic over email, but totally animated and lively over the phone or in person. Decide on the right interview method for each person.
- Don't launch into the 'tough' or meaty questions straight away. You need to warm them up, get comfortable with each other. Ask them some questions that don't really matter first – like how's the tour, how long you been doing this, where you from etc. etc. ad. lib. to fade. You need to start slow and build up, and then take 'em down again. If the interview has a good flow, then it also makes writing it up a lot easier.
- Don't be afraid to just double check that you've asked everything you needed. You should have written down your questions, so just go back through them and fill in any gaps, cause it could be the only chance you have to talk to this person as well.

- Don't be afraid to ask 'dumb' questions. If you don't understand something, and you were too self-conscious to ask, you're going to look even worse when it comes to writing up the article. Hey, you can always blame it on your readers: "For those readers who might not get this straight away, can you explain that in basic terms?"
- Getting quotes. As in the succinct, articulate or funny snatches of conversation that make a paragraph perfect. You'll know it when you hear it. If you're not getting the quotes you want, try asking the same thing framed in different words. It helps if you have thought about how to ask the question beforehand. You want to ask things that are going to elicit colourful quotes, not yes or no answers. Get them to describe, tell you about an experience, rather than ask them closed questions.
- Always thank them for their time; it could be the difference between convincing them to give you information again or not.
- Something that also counts: getting their personal details right. Triple check the spelling of their name, get their age, and school or occupation.

- **Vox Pops**

These are like mini-interviews in which you stop people on the street and ask them the same series of irrelevant questions and then take their photo. Always get their name (first name's fine, double check spelling), age, and school.