

## Personal Interview

A personal interview must be included as one of the sources you used to write your research paper. Information from that interview must be referenced in your paper and the interview must be properly cited on the Works Cited page of each draft of your paper.

A personal interview is one in which you sit down with a person who has professional experience or expertise in a particular area and ask this person questions, the answers to which will help you further your research. A personal interview is *not* an interview someone else conducted that you saw, read, listened to or otherwise encountered. It is *your* interview and this means you:

1. Set up the interview.
2. Develop and ask the questions.
3. Take notes and record the information.
4. Provide your interviewee with an Interview Evaluation Form that he/she must fill out, sign and get back to you no later than January 4..
5. Use some of the information you obtained to write a better research paper.

**Be sure that the person in your primary interview is at least 21 years of age and is not related to you!!!**

A personal interview can be a powerful research tool because it allows you to gain information straight “from the horse’s mouth” as it were. When reading a magazine article you do not have the luxury of asking follow-up questions that occur to you as you read and think about the information. In an interview you can. Interviews often yield more information than traditional resources because they allow you to get a better feel for the subject and a more comprehensive understanding of a topic.

### Setting Up The Interview

The following guidelines should be used to contact the subject of your interview and establish a time, date, and place where the interview will be held. Remember, as the saying goes, you never get a second chance to make a first impression, so how you present yourself when making first contact with your subject *is* important. It can affect not only the subject’s opinion of you but the overall success and value of the interview itself. With this in mind, you should:

- Call the person you would like to interview.
- Introduce yourself as a senior at BHS.
- Explain the purpose of the interview.
- Have some potential questions available so you can suggest types of things you would be asking and want to find out.
- Establish a mutually convenient time and place.

A possible script for this conversation might sound like the following:

*“Hello, Professor Sheckley. My name is Susan Smith. I am a senior at Barrington High School and I was wondering if you could help me with some research for my Senior Project. I need some first hand information about the current political situation in South Africa. I am particularly interested in the lasting social and political effects of apartheid. I saw in the newspaper that you just returned from that country so I thought you would be an excellent source. Could we set up an appointment to meet so I could ask you some questions? What would be a good time for you? I’m available any day after school except Tuesday and Thursday. What would be a good location at which to meet? Your office, the high school or the public library would all be good for me. . .”*

### **Procedure for the Interview**

Once you have scheduled the interview, the real work begins. An interview is all about questions and answers. In order to get strong, thoughtful and informative answers, you have to ask strong, thoughtful and informed questions. Do not go into an interview “cold” having not prepared any questions beforehand. Spontaneity is a wonderful thing – sometimes. This is usually not the case, however, in an interview. Remember your subject has given of his/her time to sit down and share his/her knowledge with you. It is imperative that you demonstrate to him/her that you have devoted a significant amount of time preparing to interview him/her.

As you sit down to develop your questions, consider your thesis/controlling statement. What type of information do you need to support your paper topic? Also consider the research you have already done for your paper. What questions still remain unanswered in your mind? Do you need additional or more authoritative support in any area? The questions you ask in your interview should be deliberate and planned so as to address the research needs you have identified.

Once you have developed your questions, use the following guidelines to ensure a successful interview:

- Call your subject the day before to confirm the meeting.
- Write out your questions ahead of time and leave plenty of space for notes/answers. Bring blank pages for any follow-up questions or questions you might think of during the interview.
- Arrive at the interview dressed neatly and a few minutes EARLY!
- Introduce yourself when you get to the meeting place. Shake hands firmly and make eye contact. A strong beginning to a successful interview might sound like this:

*“Hello, Professor Sheckley. I’m Susan Smith from Barrington High School. (Shake hands) Thanks for meeting with me today. I have some questions for you.”*

- If you intend to tape record the interview, ask for and receive permission from your subject before you start to do so. If you are going to use a tape recorder, still take

- notes on your conversation as a backup. Batteries have a way of dying at the worst times in the field.
- Speak slowly and clearly. Ask questions and listen to the responses. Make eye contact frequently. Do not appear disinterested even if a long-winded answer is provided to a simple question.
  - Take careful notes but it is not necessary to write down every word spoken. Process and synthesize the information, noting important points or comments. Read back any direct quotes you may wish to use to check for accuracy and agreement.

When you are finished:

- A. Be sure to get the signed Interview Evaluation form no later than January 16, 2019.
- B. Thank the person for his/her time, tell him/her you found the information interesting and valuable to your Senior Project, stand up and shake his/her hand. A strong ending to a successful interview might sound like this:

*“Thanks again, Ms. Sheckley. I really appreciate your taking the time to meet with me.” (Shake hands)*